RAINBOW HILL

JOSEPHINE LAWRENCE

Merry Christmas

to

Mickey Jean

1946

From Auntie Pat.

RAINBOW HILL

"THIS THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE BEEN ON A FARM?" HE ASKED.

RAINBOW HILL

By

Josephine Lawrence

Author of

ROSEMARY

Illustrated by

Thelma Gooch

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Rainbow Hill

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RAINBOW HILL

CHAPTER I

PLANS

DOCTOR HUGH leaned back in his swivel chair and looked anxiously at his mother.

"I don't believe you realize how incessant the noise will be," he urged. "Every morning hammering and sawing and the inevitable shouting and argument that seem to attend all building operations, especially when the job is one of alteration, like this."

"I shall not mind the noise, dear," said Mrs. Willis tranquilly. "Let me see the plans again."

She held out her hand for the blue prints and four interested heads immediately bent above them, Rosemary being tall enough to look over her mother's shoulder and Sarah and Shirley pressing close to her side.

"I don't see how anyone can tell a thing from

that," Rosemary complained. "There's nothing but white lines."

The doctor smiled, but his glance was on the frail, almost transparent hands which held the roll of paper flat on the desk.

"I suppose you thought that carpenters worked from photographs of completed interiors, or illustrations in interior-decoration catalogues," he suggested good-naturedly. "You see before you, Rosemary, a most practical conception of two offices and a reception room. Mr. Greggs will rip out one side of the house and add them on as a wing and when the joining is painted over you'll think those rooms were built when the original house was."

"Well—all right," conceded Rosemary, "I suppose Mr. Greggs knows. Anyway, it will be fun to have something going on. Vacation certainly isn't very exciting."

"I want to see them rip the house," announced Sarah with intense satisfaction.

"I think I owe it to Mr. Greggs almost as much as to Mother, to have you at a safe distance before the ripping begins," said Doctor Hugh a little grimly. "Somehow I have the feeling, Sarah, that the best-laid plans of architects may go awry when you're about."

"Huh!" retorted Sarah, abandoning blue prints for her favorite goatskin rug on which she flopped in an attitude more comfortable than graceful.

Shirley, too, wearying of the unfamiliar, turned to the delights of the iron wastebasket into which she tried to wedge her plump self with indifferent success and a great crackling of paper.

Doctor Hugh began to sharpen a pencil with meticulous care, his dark eyes behind their glasses apparently intent on the task in hand. But the more discerning of his patients, and every nurse who had served on his cases, could have told you that Doctor Willis always saw most when he appeared to be quite absorbed.

Even an outsider would have been interested in the group gathered in the young doctor's office that summer afternoon. The little mother (she was no taller than her oldest daughter and came only to her tall son's shoulder) sat at one side of the flat-topped desk, leaning her head on one hand as she studied the plans for the addition to the house. She was very lovely and very appealing, from her wavy dark hair faintly streaked with gray to her little buckled slippers, and there was nothing of the invalid about her. It would

have been difficult to say, off-hand, just why she should inspire the conviction, immediate and swift, that those who loved her must be constantly on guard to protect her against physical exhaustion and weakness. Difficult, that is, only until one saw her patient, shining eyes and then one knew, what had never been hidden from Doctor Hugh, that in her body dwelt an unquenchable spirit that would always outrun her strength.

In Rosemary, leaning above her mother and studying the blue prints so intently that a little frown gathered between her arched brows, the spirit and strength were united. The effect of Rosemary on the most casual beholder, was always one of radiance. The mass of her waving hair was bronze, said her friends; it was red, it was gold, it was all of these. Her eyes were like her mother's, a violet blue, but dancing, drenched in tears or black with storm—seldom patient eyes. She lived intensely, did Rosemary, and sometimes she hurt herself and sometimes she hurt others. She could be obstinate—wanting her own way with the insistence of a driving force; that was the Willis will working in her, Winnie said. All the Willis children had that trait, Winnie said also. Rosemary could

be sorry and make frank confession. That, Sarah always thought, was the hardest thing in the world to do.

The dark and stolid Sarah lying on her stomach on the white goatskin rug, was "the queer one" of the family. Sarah's nature was as uncompromising as her own square-toed sandals and about as blunt. Demonstrations of affection bored her. She tended strictly to her interests and felt small concern in the affairs of her sisters. You could reach Sarah—after you had learned the way—and the depths in her were worth reaching. But her one passionate devotion was for animals—she would do anything for her pets, dare anything for them. Sometimes Doctor Hugh wondered if she would not sacrifice anyone to their needs.

If one desired a contrast to Sarah, there was Shirley. Shirley who sat in the wastebasket and beamed upon an approving world. Six year old Shirley was a born sunbeam and her brief fits of temper only seemed to intensify the normal sunshine of her disposition. She smiled and she coaxed answering smiles from the severest mortal; she dimpled and laughter bubbled up to meet her chuckling mirth. It was impossible to remain cross or ill-tempered when

Shirley danced into a room and it is to be feared that her gifts of cajolery bought her off from often needed reproofs. It was never easy to scold Shirley.

Doctor Hugh Willis, sharpening his pencil so painstakingly, knew all this and more. To his natural endowment of keen-eyed penetration had been recently added the illuminating experience of a year as sole head of the household —a year in which the little mother had been absent in a sanitarium recovering her shattered health and he had been responsible for the welfare of his sisters.

Not the least interesting figure of that group —Doctor Hugh. Dark-haired, dark-eyed and tall, his keen, intelligent face could be as expressive as Rosemary's. His chin was firm and his mouth could be grim and smiling, by turns. His speaking voice was rather remarkable in the range of its modulations and his manner was incisive as one used to commanding obedience. His patients said "Doctor" had a way with him.

"Shall I cut the cake, or put it on whole?" inquired someone blandly on the other side of the closed door.

"There's Winnie," said Mrs. Willis, lifting her head and smiling. "Open the door, Shirley."

Five pairs of eyes turned affectionately to the tall, thin woman who stepped into the room as Shirley obeyed. This was Winnie without whom the Willis household would have been lost indeed since for twenty-eight years she had solved every domestic difficulty for them, shrewdly and capably. Loyalty and service were beautiful, concrete things in her faithful loving eyes. Dear Winnie!

"About the cake," she said now, smoothing her immaculate apron and glancing sharply at the circle of rather serious faces.

"Bother the cake," answered Doctor Hugh, secure in the knowledge that whatever he said would receive Winnie's unqualified approval. "Have you seen the plans for the new office, Winnie?"

"That I have not," she replied eagerly and Rosemary yielded her place while Winnie stared over Mrs. Willis' shoulder at the mysterious white lines and dots.

"You must be expecting a lot of sick folks, Hughie," she commented after a moment's study.

"I'll give up the other office," the doctor explained, "and have all my office hours here."

"When can Mr. Greggs start work, Hugh?"

asked his mother, rescuing the elastic bands from Shirley and moving the ink well back from the small, exploring fingers.

"Next week, he hopes," Doctor Hugh answered. "There won't be any digging to be done, because we are not going to extend the cellar; but there will be mason work for the foundation and they want to open out the side of the hall as soon as they start."

"It will be messy," said Winnie, with unmistakable disapproval of anything "messy."

"It will be messy," agreed the doctor. "Worse than that, it will be noisy. I want Mother and you to take the girls and go away till it is over. I don't think anyone should be asked to endure the sound of constant hammering in the hot weather; I'll be out of the house so much that I don't count and of course I'll keep the other office till things are in shape here."

He spoke evenly, but his eyes met Winnie's across Mrs. Willis' shapely drooping head.

"I think we ought to get out of Mr. Greggs' way," declared Winnie briskly. "Carpenters have small patience with women and their housekeeping habits. They think we're interfering when we only want to keep 'em from driving nails in the mahogany tables. And if they're go-

ing to ruin the hall rug with their bricks and mortar I, for one, don't want to be here to see it."

"Oh, Winnie, you fraud!" Mrs. Willis spoke merrily. "You are not worrying about the hall rug—I know you too well. You're siding with Hugh and you are both conspiring to wreck the household budget a second time. I had all the luxury one woman is entitled to last year in the sanitarium—from now on I intend to consider expenses and a summer away from home isn't to be thought of."

"Your health is worth more than dollars and cents," said Winnie sagely.

"I'm not going to take music lessons this vacation," offered Rosemary. "That ought to help, Mother."

"If I can arrange it so you can leave the house while the alterations are being put through and yet keep the living expenses down to your stipulated level—will you go, Mother?" said Doctor Hugh artfully.

"Can you come, too?" countered his mother.

"Well—part of the time at least," he temporized.

A sudden picture of her orderly quiet home in the hands of the loud-talking, aggressively

cheerful town carpenter and his helpers, the gash in the hall letting in dirt and flies, with the attendant bustle and confusion that go with artisan work, flashed across Mrs. Willis' vision. Sarah and Shirley must be constantly admonished to keep out of mischief and danger, Winnie placated when her domain should be encroached upon. And the noise of hammers and saws and files!

"I have only two objections to going away, Hugh," said Mrs. Willis quietly. "One is leaving you and the other is the expense."

"Then it is as good as settled," declared Doctor Hugh, rolling up the blue prints and snapping an elastic around them as though he snapped his ideas into place with the same deft movement.

Rosemary's eyes began to shine.

"Oh, Hugh, tell us!" she begged. "I know you have some perfectly lovely plan—tell us what it is."

But the doctor's smile was enigmatic and the two words he vouchsafed a conundrum to them all.

"Rainbow Hill," was the answer he made to every question.

Winnie, always an ally of the doctor's, ap-

pealed to, could give no help. "If you studied geography more and cats less, Sarah," she informed that small girl who insisted on repeated questioning, "you might be able to tell *me*. I've told you before that I know nothing at all about this Rainbow Hill."

And Rosemary, waylaying her brother with carefully planned nonchalance, fared no more successfully.

"You can't wheedle any news out of me, my dear," announced Doctor Hugh, his eyes twinkling. "All in good time—and after Mother, you'll be the first to be told. Patience is a virtue, Rosemary."

And then he ducked to escape the porch cushion she sent whirling toward him.

CHAPTER II

LOOKING FORWARD

"I DON'T believe you've heard a word I've been saying, Jack Welles!"

The boy on his knees before the tangled fishing tackle spread out on the lowest porch step, looked up alertly.

"Sure I heard," he protested. "Something or other is 'perfectly adorable.' "

Rosemary laughed. She had been sitting in the porch swing and now she came and camped on the middle step, chin in hand, regardless of the hot sunshine that turned her bronze hair to red gold.

"I suppose I did say that," she admitted. "But it really is, Jack. I don't believe Mother would call it an exaggeration."

Jack Welles frowned at a tangle of line.

"I heard you," he said again, "but I didn't get where this place is—I saw you and your mother going off with Hugh in the car this morning," he added.

"I'll untangle that for you," offered Rosemary, holding out her hand for the line. "We went to see Rainbow Hill and now Mother is crazy to go there for the summer. Hugh is as pleased as pleased can be, for he wants her to go somewhere before Mr. Greggs starts the work here."

"Where's Rainbow Hill?" asked Jack, watching the slim fingers as they worked at the waxed silk thread so woefully knotted.

"That's the best part of the whole plan," Rosemary assured him, taking his knowledge of a plan for granted. "It's only about eight or nine miles from here and twelve from Bennington. Hugh can easily come out in the car. You must have seen the house, Jack—it is right on the tip-top of that hill to the right, the little white clapboarded house you see as soon as you pass the cross-roads."

"I've seen it," said Jack.

"Well you may have seen it, but you can't tell how lovely it is until you go through it," declared Rosemary, winding a free length of line about her slender wrist for safe-keeping. "There's no front porch—you step into the living-room right from the lawn. But there is a side porch with awnings and screens that Mother will just love."

"Where are the folks who live there?" demanded the practical Jack.

"They're going to California, to visit their married daughter," Rosemary explained. "They're patients of Hugh's—Mr. and Mrs. Hammond. And they wanted to rent the house because they didn't like the idea of closing it for almost three months with all their nice furniture and a piano and everything in it. So—wasn't it lucky—they happened to ask Hugh if he knew of anyone who would rent the place furnished and he saw right away it would be just the thing for us."

"Whereupon they insisted that he take it as a gift, with a maid and two butlers thrown in," recited Jack, who knew in what affection Doctor Hugh's patients held him.

"Not exactly," dimpled Rosemary, "but they did say that if Mother would live there during the summer they would consider it a favor and wouldn't dream of charging rent. Mrs. Hammond said she knew she wouldn't have to worry about her things if Doctor Hugh's mother would be there to look after them. But, of course, Hugh wouldn't listen to that—he said business was business and as soon as he and Mr. Hammond had the rent fixed, Hugh took Mother

and me to see Rainbow Hill. And it's too lovely for words."

"Any butlers?" suggested Jack.

"Not a butler," answered Rosemary firmly. "Winnie beats all the butlers I ever saw—or read about," she emended, remembering that her actual experience with butlers was limited.

"Winnie won't take kindly to pumping water from the well every morning," said Jack, sorting fish hooks with a practised hand.

"There's no water to pump," was the prompt and cheerful response. "It's an old-fashioned house, but the plumbing is new—Hugh found that out before he even mentioned Rainbow Hill to Mother. It will be such fun to show the place to Sarah and Shirley—I can hardly wait."

Jack looked up at the vivid, glowing face above him.

"I can imagine Sarah let loose on a farm," he said drily. "They'd better tie up the pigs and nail down the cows—I wouldn't trust that girl within ten feet of a live animal."

"You think you're smart, Jack Welles!" broke in the wrathful voice of Sarah as that young person hurled herself around the side of the house and confronted them indignantly. "You think you're smart, don't you?"

" 'Scuse me, Sarah, I didn't know you were within hearing distance," apologized Jack with proper contriteness. "Don't be mad at me, Sally, for here you are going away—when are you going?"

"Monday," said Sarah sullenly.

"You're going away Monday," went on Jack, "and you may not see me till September; can't we part friends, Sarah?"

Sarah regarded him suspiciously, but he surveyed her over his fish hooks and was apparently quite serious.

"I'll be glad to leave some people in this neighborhood," stated Sarah with peculiar distinctness. "I'm going to do just as I please at Rainbow Hill."

"Then I take it that Hugh won't be there?" said Jack, but Rosemary hastened to act as peacemaker.

"Don't fuss," she advised them wisely. "Jack, I may learn how to fish this summer myself—Mr. Hammond told Hugh that Mr. Hildreth is a great fisherman."

Jack asked who Mr. Hildreth was and Sarah answered that he was the tenant farmer.

"And his wife is the tenant farmeress," said Sarah importantly. "They live in another house and plant things—Hugh told me."

"Yes'm, I don't doubt it," agreed Jack, when he had assimilated this remarkable information, "but how come a farmer and a farmeress have time to give lessons in fishing?"

Rosemary began on the last knot in the line.

"Don't be silly, Jack," she begged. "There'll be two boys there—Mrs. Hildreth says her husband gets two students from the State Agricultural College to help him every summer. They'll want to go fishing and Sarah and I can go along."

"When you farm, you farm," said Jack sententiously. "You don't hoe the potatoes one day and then go fishing for a week. But I may be wrong at that and if you find Mr. Hildreth needs an extra hired man, Rosemary, one to go fishing, I mean, ask him to send for me. I'll come right up and fish and look after the garden in my odd moments."

"Hugh's coming to spend two weeks in August," announced Sarah. "And he'll come out as many week-ends as he can; will you really come, Jack?"

"I always did yearn to be a hired man," Jack answered earnestly, "and they tell us there is no time like the present to put one's ambition in training. I'm awfully afraid I'll have to earn

my living after I leave school and a nice trade, like that of hired man, might be useful in my later life. I'll think it over and let you know, Sarah; but don't let Mr. Hildreth build on my coming—I can't face his grief and disappointment in case I fail to turn up."

"You think you're smart!" was Sarah's retort and Rosemary said to herself that it was impossible to tell when Jack was in earnest.

Winnie came out and told them that lunch was ready just then, and Jack took his fishing tackle and retreated to his own home which was next door, first thanking Rosemary fervently for the unknotted line she handed him.

There were times during the days of preparation for the eventful Monday when Mrs. Willis wondered whether they were really wise to go to so much trouble, times when she thought wearily that her own home, noisy as it might be, would be far preferable to the effort required to adapt her family to a new environment.

Rosemary put the feeling into words one noon when the doctor came home to lunch and found her sitting on the floor beside a trunk with a lapful of rusty keys.

"Nothing fits," complained Rosemary. "All the keys to everything are lost. And I don't see

what good a restful summer will do Mother if she has nervous prostration before she gets off."

Doctor Hugh settled several difficulties in as many minutes—he had a gift for that—by dispatching Sarah to the locksmith with soft-soap impressions of the keyless locks and orders to get keys to fit them and insisting that his mother must stay quietly in her room the remainder of the day and be served with luncheon and supper there.

"You girls try to talk all at once," he told his three sisters when they sat down at last to Winnie's rice waffles, "and that is enough to tire anyone."

"Can't I take the cat, Hugh?" urged Sarah anxiously. "You can take it in the car for me and I know fresh country air will be good for poor Esther."

"Esther wouldn't appreciate Rainbow Hill," said Doctor Hugh with conviction. "Cats don't like to change their homes, Sarah. Besides, you'll have all the animals you want once you are on the farm. And that reminds me I want to say one thing to you."

"I suppose," remarked Sarah plaintively, "you're going to scold."

"Not exactly," said her brother, smiling in

spite of himself. "But while I want you to have a happy summer, Sarah, and 'collect' snakes and bugs and insects to your heart's content, I want you to understand clearly that the menagerie is to be kept outside of the house. Mother and Winnie mustn't be expected to get used to finding snakes in boxes and spiders in bottles, and the place to study a colony of ants is outside, not in the front hall. If I find you can't remember this one rule, you'll have to come back to Eastshore and stay with me during the week."

Sarah, with an unhappy recollection of the furore she had created the week before when she had bodily transplanted a thriving colony of ants to the hall rug, promised to remember.

"Jack Welles said he might come up for a couple of weeks and be a hired man," announced Rosemary, smiling.

"I hope he does," approved the doctor promptly. "He'll find it an endurance test and a particularly valuable one. Yes, Winnie?"

"I wish you'd step out and look at the canna bed," said Winnie grimly. "Every single plant pulled out and left dying in the sun."

"Why, I did that," declared Shirley in her clear little voice that always reminded Winnie

of a robin's chirp. "I thought Mother would want to take the cannas to Rainbow Hill with us—we can plant them around the porch there."

Doctor Hugh pushed back his chair, his mouth twitching.

"Whatever happens this summer, Winnie," he said gravely, "something tells me that you won't be bored."

CHAPTER III

RAINBOW HILL

A WHITE clapboarded house with moss-green shutters and a dark oak "Dutch" door, the upper half of which swung hospitably open—this was Rainbow Hill in the light of the late June afternoon sun. A little jewel of a house set in the center of a close-cropped emerald-green lawn and circled by sturdy old trees, elms and maples that had marked the site of the old homestead and now guarded the "new house" as it had been called ever since it had been built six years before to replace the farmhouse destroyed by fire.

"Welcome to Rainbow Hill," said Mrs. Joseph Hildreth, coming out on the red tiled walk as a car swept up to the door and stopped.

Mrs. Hildreth, the wife of the tenant farmer, was a young woman with wide-awake blue eyes and an air of capability that struck terror to the souls of the lazy. She was known far and wide as "a hustler" and she had been known to do a

large washing and baking in the morning and drive the hay rake in the field in the afternoon on occasions when her husband was short of help. It was a pity her voice was so loud and rasping, but then not everyone is sensitive to voices.

"I guess you'll find everything about ready for your supper," said Mrs. Hildreth when Doctor Hugh had introduced Sarah and Shirley and Winnie, the three members of the party she had not met previously. "I brought up a pail of strawberries—they'll be better next week. Mrs. Hammond said you were to have half the garden, same as they did. The butter may be a little soft, but Joe will get you a piece of ice in the morning at the creamery. We weren't sure you'd get here to-day, so I didn't order it."

With a few more confidences, directed mainly to Winnie, she went back to her own house—an attractive story and a half bungalow just visible from the side porch, and the Willis family were free to take possession of Rainbow Hill.

"Isn't it darling!" Rosemary kept exclaiming. "Aren't the rugs pretty—and the white curtains! Wait till you see the rooms upstairs."

In spite of Winnie's warning that supper would be ready in fifteen minutes and Doctor Hugh's declaration that he must go back to

Eastshore as soon as the meal was over, it was impossible to refrain from running upstairs for a peep at the second story. There was a large and airy bedroom for the mother, a connecting room which was allotted to Rosemary and across the hall a smaller room with twin beds which would, it was instantly decided, "fit" Sarah and Shirley. Next to this was the guest room which Doctor Hugh would occupy during his visits, and at the other end of the hall, next to the shining blue and white tiled bathroom, a square room with two windows and a narrow balcony that delighted Winnie.

"There's no nicer place to dry your hair," she explained seriously to Mrs. Willis. "I can sit out there and darn stockings while my hair is drying."

The trunks and one or two boxes, packed with necessary possessions mostly of a personal nature, had been sent on ahead in the morning and were already in the halls. The house was tastefully furnished throughout and Mrs. Willis assured her son that as soon as she had rearranged a few trifles and had unpacked her treasures she was sure she would feel contented and at home.

"I want to go everywhere!" declared Sarah, subsiding into a chair at the dining-room table

with visible reluctance. "I want to see the horses and the cows and the pigs. Say, Hugh, do you think we could keep pigs when we go home? There's room in the yard."

"You want to go to bed early and save your exploring until to-morrow," advised the doctor. "I have to be back at the house by eight and that's bed-time for one little girl I know. Shirley looks sleepy now."

"I'm not," said Shirley automatically, her invariable remark whenever the subject was mentioned.

Although the doctor had an appointment waiting him, he seemed to find it hard to tear himself away from the pleasant picture the mother and her three daughters made on the spacious side porch after supper that night. Winnie had insisted on displaying her convenient kitchen and though there was no gas range she declared that the oil stove would fulfill all her requirements except for her weekly baking when she would build a fire in the range. There were electric lights throughout the house; and the outbuildings, as they learned later, as well as the tenant house, were also wired.

"Here comes somebody!" said Sarah in a loud whisper. "It's the farmeress."

"No it isn't, it's two of them," asserted Shirley, pressing her small nose against the wire screen and acquiring a plaid pattern on the tip.

"Hush—they'll hear you," said Mrs. Willis, rising and opening the screen door as two young men came across the lawn.

"Mrs. Willis?" said the taller. "Mr. Hildreth sent us up to see if you wanted any help, unpacking. This is Richard Gilbert," he introduced his companion, "and I am Warren Baker. We're working for Mr. Hildreth this summer."

Doctor Hugh came forward at once and while they were being introduced the three girls studied the newcomers with interest. They were both apparently about eighteen years old, both deeply tanned, both slim and muscular and wholesome-looking. Richard Gilbert was slightly shorter and heavier than Warren, who was really thin. The latter had dark hair and gray eyes, while Richard's hair and eyes were brown. Both boys were neatly, if not smartly, dressed and gave a pleasant impression of cleanliness, coolness and comfort, though they had done a heavy day's work and their day had started at five that morning. Rosemary instantly decided that she liked them both.

So did the rest of the Willis family, and Doc-

tor Hugh delayed his departure till he declared that one more moment would mean he must break the speed laws to get back to town. It had been arranged that he was to take his breakfast and dinner with the hospitable Welles, a most convenient plan since their house was the nearest. He was seldom home for lunch and his telephone calls would be taken care of at the "Jordan office" as Eastshore still called the rooms which had been occupied by the old and popular physician whose practise had been taken over by Doctor Hugh.

Mrs. Willis watched him drive away, satisfied that his comfort was provided for; and then, as she had decreed that no unpacking was to be done that night, Richard and Warren took their leave, after promising to show the girls the whole farm the next morning.

"If they know what they're about, they'll tie a rope to Sarah," said Winnie, going about locking doors and windows as though she expected a siege.

She had managed to "get a good look," as she said, at the visitors and had approved of them whole-heartedly.

"Nice, ordinary boys," she said to Mrs. Willis at the first opportunity. "Not a bit stiff or shy,

did you notice, and yet not any of these smart Alecs that can't stop talking long enough to listen to what a body has to say."

"What are you locking up all the windows for, Winnie?" Sarah questioned her, sitting down on the rug to take off her sandals as a preparation for the trip upstairs. "You'll have to open them all in the morning again."

"Well, maybe I will," admitted Winnie, turning the key in the front door and sliding both bolts with emphasis, "but I won't come downstairs and find the parlor full of skunks and owls and bats—we'll be saved that."

"They couldn't get through the screens," protested Sarah, whose natural tendency to argue was intensified by weariness.

"You never can tell," was Winnie's answer to this. "I'm not taking any chances in the country."

She thought Sarah had gone up to bed and was startled a few minutes later, when busy in the kitchen, to hear the door open behind her.

"What are you doing, Winnie?" demanded Sarah, her dark eyes instantly coming to rest on the table where, spread out in imposing array, were three mousetraps and the cheese with which Winnie intended to bait them.

"If you must know," said Winnie, exasperated, "I'm setting mousetraps."

"Oh!" Sarah gulped. "Oh, Winnie—the poor little mice!"

"Now, Sarah, don't begin all that," Winnie pleaded. "I'm dead tired and I haven't the heart to start a debate with you. I'll say one thing and then I'm through; I don't intend and nothing shall induce me, to have a lot of nasty little mice tramping over my pantry shelves."

"How do you know they will?" asked Sarah.

"Because," said Winnie with terrible finality.

Sarah and Shirley were asleep two minutes after their heads touched the pillow; and the house was in darkness soon after, for they were all tired from the events of the day.

In her room, though, Rosemary did not find that sleep came immediately. After lying quietly in bed, staring into the soft darkness, she felt more wide-awake than ever. She slipped softly to the floor, felt for and found her pretty white dressing gown and slippers—Rosemary was very fond of white—which were close at hand and, wrapping herself up comfortably, pattered over to the open window.

It was a moonlight night, warm and sweet, and Rosemary knelt down with a little gasp at

the loveliness spread before her. She rested her elbows on the low window sill and leaned forward, drinking in the scent of new hay and roses and dewy grass. The shrill, insistent chorus of insects was music, and when the mournful cry of a distant hoot owl came out of the woods that rose shadowy and dark across the white ribbon of road, why that was music, too. Country nights are no more absolutely silent than nights in the town or city, but some enchantment weaves the noises of the countryside into graceful harmony. The cry of a bird, the soft stirring of the animals in the barns, the far barking of a watchful dog—all these Rosemary heard; and the insects filled in the pauses.

She did not know how long she had been at the window when, faintly—miles away, she would have said—she heard the notes of a violin.

"Rosemary!" whispered someone from the doorway. "Are you awake, darling?"

Mrs. Willis came across the room and knelt beside her daughter.

"Did you hear it, Mother? It couldn't be a violin—yes, it is! But at this time of night and way out in the country!"

"Listen!" said Mrs. Willis softly.

Rosemary had inherited her passionate love

for music from her, and her delight and wonder were no greater than her mother's as the music came nearer. Someone was playing Schubert's "Serenade" in the moonlight.

"I see him!" whispered Rosemary. "Look, Mother—an old man!"

Sure enough, as they watched, a halting figure came down the road which the moonlight had changed to a silver ribbon. They knew he was old for he was stooped and walked with the shuffling gait that comes from feebleness. His head was bent over his violin, and as he walked those unearthly sweet strains melted into the moonlight and became a part of the silver mist. Just as he reached a point opposite the house he must have stopped. A tree hid him from the two watching. Probably he sat down on the large rock at the side of the road to rest—to rest and play. For, hidden from the enthralled listeners, he played the "Serenade" through twice, lovingly, delicately, with a haunting yearning that held a touch of genius. Then, still playing, he shuffled on. They caught a glimpse of him as he came out from behind the tree, saw the light flash on his bow and he was gone. They listened until his music had died away in the distance—always the "Serenade," over and over.

"Oh—Mother!" Rosemary raised her blue eyes, swimming in tears.

"Yes, dearest—" there was a little catch in Mrs. Willis' tender voice. "It was very beautiful and very wonderful—but you must go to bed now. It is late."

Rosemary, turning drowsily to pillow her cheek on her hand after her mother's kiss, was conscious of a hope that the old violin player might not lack a comfortable bed and the peace and security of a home—somewhere.

"It is so nice at Rainbow Hill," murmured Rosemary, drifting off into delicious slumber.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"AREN'T you ever going to get up?" demanded Sarah.

Rosemary sat up and regarded her sister sleepily.

"Did you hear the violin?" she asked.

"What violin?" Sarah's surprise was an answer in itself.

While she dressed, hurried by the impatient younger girls, for Shirley soon joined Sarah, Rosemary told of the music she had heard the night before.

"Mother heard it, too; we both saw the old man," she asserted when they were inclined to be skeptical and scoffed that she had been dreaming.

Winnie had evidently risen "with the larks" as she was fond of declaring (though when pressed by Sarah, intent on the habits and traits of larks, she had been forced to admit that she had never seen one) for the windows on the first

floor were unlocked and open to the fresh morning air and the upper half of the Dutch door folded back to let in a flood of sunshine.

"Breakfast will be ready in ten minutes," Winnie greeted the girls. "Ten minutes, no more, no less; and you're not to set foot out of the house until you've eaten, because I don't intend to spend my time fishing Sarah out of the well and pulling Shirley from under a hay stack while the muffins are getting cold."

Mrs. Willis, coming downstairs, cool and sweet in a blue linen gown, laughed at this arraignment but she, too, insisted that the farm should be seen after breakfast.

"And do be careful about hindering Mr. and Mrs. Hildreth," she cautioned them as they sat down at the table. "They are very busy folk, I know, and you mustn't expect them to answer too many questions. Richard and Warren will have their work laid out for them and can't be distracted—you will have weeks to explore Rainbow Hill and I don't want you to feel that you must be shown everything in one day."

"I'll help you, Mother," promised Rosemary. "Sarah and Shirley can go out and play, but I'll help you and Winnie unpack."

However, when Sarah and Shirley dashed out

of the house a few minutes later, Rosemary was with them. Mrs. Willis had explained that her eldest daughter could help her more by "looking after" the impetuous Shirley and that unknown quantity, Sarah, than by remaining in the house to open the trunks and boxes.

"I am going to do just as much as I can and then stop," the mother said, smilingly. "I promised Hugh and Winnie to be temperate and not tire myself needlessly. Hugh will probably call up this morning and I want to be here when he does. You run along with Sarah and Shirley, Rosemary—Mother feels safe about them when she knows you are with them."

Rosemary flushed with pleasure and resolved to be worthy of the confidence. She would be more patient than she had ever been before.

"It's just like Rosemary, to offer to stay in and help," said Winnie, watching the three girls cut across the lawn in the direction of the barns, "you could see plain she was crazy to go out and look around, but she never grabs what she wants—that child was born unselfish."

Rainbow Hill was what, in the farming parlance, is known as "an all around" place. That meant the owner, Mr. Hammond, believed in general farming as distinguished from the spe-

cialized type such as truck farming or dairying. Some oats and wheat were grown at Rainbow Hill, several acres of tomatoes raised yearly for the cannery, a good crop of hay harvested; there would be one "field crop" raised for marketing, generally potatoes or cabbage. The milk from a small herd of cows was sold at the local creamery and all food for the animals on the place was grown on the farm. How much hard work was bound up in the tilling of the well-ordered fields, the cultivation of the thrifty orchard and the healthy aspect presented by the live stock was something the three Willis girls could not be expected to grasp at once. Everything was beautifully neat, from the freshly swept barn floor to the white-washed chicken houses; not a weed showed its head in the large vegetable garden and a town-bred girl might easily make the mistake of thinking that this state of affairs was always to be found on every farm—something to be taken for granted, like fresh eggs or new milk.

It was in the vegetable garden that they found Warren Baker. He was dressed in a clean blue shirt and dark blue overalls and he was on his knees beside a long row of thin green spikes.

"Good morning," he greeted the visitors

politely. "Out seeing the sights? But didn't you forget your hats?"

Warren wore an immense straw hat that shaded the back of his neck as effectively as his face.

"Oh, we don't want to bother with hats," said Rosemary carelessly. "Aren't those onions you're weeding?"

"They're onions," answered Warren, "but I'm not weeding them; I'm thinning them. If you stayed in one place in the sun as long as I do, a hat would feel pretty good."

Sarah asked why he was "thinning" the onions and he explained that he pulled out some to give those left more room to grow.

"This the first time you've been on a farm?" he asked her.

"The first time I ever stayed on a farm," said Sarah with precision. "I've been to different farms with Hugh—that's my brother; but we only stayed a little while. I think, when I grow up, I'll have a farm and be an animal doctor."

"Sarah loves animals," Rosemary explained. "We've seen the horses in the barn and the chickens and the pigs; but we didn't see a cow yet."

"Rich turns them into the lane as soon as he

finishes milking," said Warren, rising from the onion row. "I'll go down and let them into the pasture now and you can come and see them, if you like."

"Well—you're sure it won't be a trouble?" hesitated Rosemary.

"Mother says we mustn't bother you," added Shirley primly, speaking for the first time.

"You can't bother me," said the boy so heartily that he reminded Rosemary of Jack Welles.

"Then don't you have to work, only when you want to?" suggested Sarah who unconsciously then and there outlined her ideals of labor.

Warren, leading the way out of the vegetable garden, laughed.

"Sure I have to work," he said good-naturedly. "If you knew Mr. Hildreth, you wouldn't ask a question like that; he does two men's work every day of his life and encourages everyone else to follow his example. But you see, I can talk and work, too; it's all right to talk, if you don't stop work to do it."

"Is it?" queried Sarah doubtfully.

"Not a question about it," declared Warren, taking down two bars for the girls to go through

into a green lane fenced in on either side with a heavy wire fence. "Talk and work, mixed, are all right, but all talk and no work makes Jack a poor hired man—haven't you ever heard that proverb?"

Sarah puzzled over this until they came up with the cows and then she forgot it promptly. There were ten of the sleek, cream-colored bossies, gentle, affectionate creatures who pressed their deep noses trustingly into Warren's hands and begged him to open the wide gate that kept them from the shady pasture.

He swung the gate back and they moved slowly forward, beginning to crop the grass before they were half way through.

"There's a brook," cried Shirley, catching sight of the water. "I want to go wading—come on!"

"Not now," said Rosemary, catching Shirley by her frock as though she feared that small girl might plunge into the stream head-first, "after lunch, dear, if Mother is willing."

"We want to do a lot of other things first," Sarah reminded her. "We haven't been up to the top of the windmill yet."

Warren turned and looked at her, a twinkle in his eyes.

"You wouldn't like it if you got up there and your sash caught on the wheel," he told her. "Think how you would look going round and round like a pinwheel. Folks would come to look at you instead of the circus."

"I wouldn't catch my sash," said Sarah positively. "There's a little platform up there and I could stand on that. And I saw the little iron stairs that go up inside like a lighthouse."

The twinkle went out of Warren Baker's eyes and his pleasant voice was serious when he spoke.

"There are just two places on this farm from which you are barred," he said, his glance including the attentive three before him. "One is the windmill; the door is usually locked and I don't know how it came to be left open this morning. But locked or not, keep out of it—it is no place for anyone unless a mechanic wants to oil or repair the machinery.

"The other place is the tool house. Mr. Hildreth has a bunch of fine tools and they're the apple of his eye—apples, would be more accurate, perhaps. The tool house is usually locked, too, and there are only three keys; but if you do find it unlocked some fine morning, take my advice and stay outside. Or, if you

must go in, don't touch a tool. The rest of the farm is open to you and the four winds—with reasonable restrictions, I ought to add."

Three pairs of eyes stared at him so solemnly, that he felt uncomfortable.

"I'm not laying down the law in my own name," he said earnestly. "Mr. Hildreth is mighty particular about how things are run at Rainbow Hill and I thought I could save you future trouble by warning you. Of course I only work for him—'hired man' is my title—and very much at your service."

There was so much boyish honesty in the speech, so much genuine good will and an utter absence of attempt to strike a pose, not unmixed with worth-while pride and a desire that his position should be clear to them from the start, that even Sarah, who was quick to resent real or fancied efforts to "boss" her, answered his smile with her own characteristic grin.

"Of course we won't go where we shouldn't," said Rosemary warmly. "At least not now, when there is no excuse for not knowing."

But Warren, noting that Sarah became absorbed in the antics of a beetle crossing her shoe, registered a resolve to see that the windmill door was kept locked.

"There's your brother," said Shirley, pointing to a figure coming down the lane.

"Rich isn't my brother—he's my pal," replied Warren. "And Mr. Hildreth is with him, so you'll have a chance to meet a real farmer and a good one."

"Then I can ask him about the insides of cats," was Sarah's rather disconcerting response.

CHAPTER V

DAYS OF DELIGHT

"YOU'RE the doctor's sisters," declared Mr. Hildreth when he was within earshot. Then, to Warren, "That row of onions isn't done."

Mr. Hildreth, the girls were to learn speedily, made statements. He did not ask questions. And usually his declarations stood unchallenged.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a rather grim, weather-beaten face and shrewd blue eyes. A hard worker, his neighbors said, and accustomed to demanding, and receiving, the best from his helpers. He was intolerant of laziness—"shiftlessness" the country phrase ran—but he had the reputation of being a just taskmaster and he could be very kind.

"I'm going back and finish the onions now," said Warren. "I came down to let the cows out."

"Rich was late this morning," asserted Rich's employer, "because he wasted time at the creamery. We're going to fix the line fence."

Rosemary looked at Richard Gilbert who carried a box of tools. He did not seem to mind the accusation brought against him—though, as a matter of fact, he had waited to get a piece of ice for Winnie and this had delayed him at the creamery—but then Richard was not easily offended. He was inclined to be easy going and was much less apt to "fire up" than Warren.

"I'm going with Warren," announced Sarah, who liked her new friend very much and saw no reason for leaving him in doubt of her feelings.

Mr. Hildreth stalked toward the brook, followed by Richard and Warren, and Sarah started up the lane. Rosemary, picking a buttercup for Shirley, was surprised to hear a sudden shout.

"Mr. Hildreth!" yelled Sarah—there is no other word for it—"Mr. Hildreth! Can you make violin strings from a cat's insides?"

The farmer, knee-deep in the brook, looked up, startled. Rosemary stared and Shirley looked interested. As for Richard and Warren, they laughed immoderately.

"A girl in school said you could," went on Sarah, still shouting. "Violin strings, she said —can you?"

"Sure—haven't you heard cats sing at night?"

called back Mr. Hildreth, having recovered his breath. "Any cat that's a good singer, will make good violin strings, Miss—er—what's her name?" he questioned Richard who was holding up one end of the sagging wire.

"That's Sarah," said Richard.

"You ask Warren, Sarah," called the farmer. "He'll tell you."

And as Warren walked on, Sarah, tagging after him, began an exhaustive and relentless study of cats and violin strings.

Richard held the wire carefully, but his dancing brown eyes suggested that he was not too busy to talk.

"There was an old man playing the violin last night," said Rosemary. "Did you hear him?"

Richard nodded.

"Old Fiddlestrings," he answered. "You'll probably hear him every moonlight night. Winter and summer he goes up and down the road playing his one tune."

"It was the 'Serenade,'" said Rosemary. "Does he always play that? Where does he live? Is he poor?"

"Not so poor as he is crazy," declared Richard sententiously. "He has enough money so he never has to work. He lives in a crazy little

cabin on the other side of the hill and has a garden where he raises herbs and sells them—they say he does a big business with the city drugstores."

"Guess you'd call it work, digging in that yard of his," observed Mr. Hildreth drily.

"Well—what I mean is, he doesn't have to go out and work by the week," explained Richard.

"And his music?" asked Rosemary, pulling Shirley back as the investigating toe of her sandal threatened to dip into the water.

"He only plays when there is a moon," said Richard, his merry face sobering. "Seems like he can't rest on a moonlight night. Sometimes he walks up and down the road for hours and sometimes he sits out in his yard and plays; but they say he never goes to bed and he never lays his violin down till morning."

"He's a good fiddler," said Mr. Hildreth.

"His music was wonderful," glowed Rosemary. "Mother and I couldn't go to bed as long as he played. I'd give anything if I could play like that!"

"You play the piano just as nice!" chirped Shirley loyally.

"Say, there is a piano in the house, isn't

there!" Richard almost dropped the wire. "Can you play?"

"Not as well as my mother," said Rosemary, "but I've studied several years."

"Can you play 'Old Black Joe'?" demanded Richard. "That's a song I always liked."

The contrast between his cheerful, open face and his melancholy taste in music was so great that Rosemary could not help laughing. But she said she could play "Old Black Joe" and promised to play it for him at the first opportunity.

Those early days at Rainbow Hill were not long enough. That was the general complaint. Mrs. Willis and Winnie, busy in the house, said evening came before the delightful tasks were half started or the more prosaic duties completed. There was the garden to be visited, the flower vases to be filled, the porch made cool and clean and comfortable, every morning; Winnie reveled in her kitchen, hung over the great pans of milk in the speckless pantry and gloated as she skimmed the heavy cream. Sarah said she saved all the cream till Hugh was expected and then served it up to him, whipped stiff in the largest bowl she could find, with fresh, hot gingerbread, the doctor's favorite dessert.

The girls roamed the place from one end to the other and knew every inch of the farm as well as the Hildreths did, in a week's time. They came in only to sleep, Winnie declared, but Mrs. Willis insisted, with a gentle firmness that was effective even with the determined Sarah, that the most strenuous day should end at five o'clock. Then, freshly bathed and dressed, they rested quietly till dinner and spent the short evening on the porch or in the pleasant living-room.

That living-room proved a magnet to Richard and Warren. As soon as the lamp was lighted and Rosemary or her mother sat down at the piano, the boys seemed irresistibly drawn to the little white house. Their evenings with the Hildreths had been dreary in the extreme—both the farmer and his hard-working wife practised and preached that "early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise"—and they either sat silently in the twilight until nine o'clock when they went to bed and set the alarm clock for five, or lit a single lamp in the kitchen and read agricultural papers by its uncertain rays.

"I hope I can be as good a farmer as Joe Hildreth," Warren once confided to Mrs. Willis, "but I think I'll have one less cultivator on my

farm and a couple more lights in my farmhouse."

No wonder that the shaded lights of that other living-room, which cast a soft and rosy glow over the simple wicker furniture and cretonne cushions, the books and magazines and the always open piano, spelled comfort and cheer to the lonely young fellows miles distant from relatives and old friends. Richard Gilbert said it was the books that drew him, while Warren thought the music lured him. In reality, it was the gracious, lovely presence of the mother, gentle Mrs. Willis who never raised her voice above its soft, even level, who moved noiselessly about the house and whose step was so light on the stair that one might easily not hear her cross the hall and enter a room. But she could not leave it that her absence was not noted and her low laughter missed.

No wonder that twenty times a day the cry, "Where's Mother?" sounded through the house. No wonder that Doctor Hugh called up every morning and "ran in" as often as his busy schedule would allow, or bore her off with him to inspect the progress of the building at the East-shore house. No wonder the nervous, driving energy of Mrs. Hildreth's nature was turned into channels that flowed back to the little lady

in the white house bearing gifts of the garden and dairy. And no wonder at all that two boys, who had never known their own mothers, found no words with which to tell her what her interest and friendship meant to them.

In time there came to exist a tacit agreement between Richard and Warren that Mrs. Willis was not to be "worried" and in the effort to spare her they assumed, unconsciously, a brotherly guardianship over the three girls for which their mother was silently grateful. It was obvious that she could not tramp the fields with them and equally apparent that they would go wherever their healthy young active curiosity might lead. Richard and Warren took upon themselves the duties of friendly counselors—and had their hands full from the start.

"Country life may be healthy," said Winnie one Saturday when Doctor Hugh was spending the week-end at Rainbow Hill, "but I don't know as I'd call it exactly beautifying. Rosemary has a crop of freckles on her nose that will probably last all winter and Sarah is about as black as the automobile curtains. As for Shirley, between the briar scratches and the bruises on her hands and arms, she looks more like a strawberry plant, than a natural, human child."

Winnie was genuinely grieved at the girls' indifference to their looks, especially Rosemary of whom she was very proud, but Doctor Hugh declared that he liked to see folk look as though they lived outdoors.

"They live outdoors all right," Winnie informed him, a trifle tartly, "in fact I don't see why you didn't lug up a couple of tents and turn 'em loose inside. Rosemary is going to be blown out of the window some fine night and, to my way of thinking, it's better to start sleeping on the ground than to land there sudden like, right in a sound sleep."

Rosemary laughed. She was sitting on the arm of her brother's chair and, despite the freckles across her nose, presented a charming picture of a pretty girl in a dull rose frock.

"Fresh air is good for you, isn't it, Hugh?" she demanded. "Winnie is always saying I ought to sleep in the 'Cave of the Winds.' "

"I wouldn't say a word, if you'd be reasonable," said Winnie, setting the table as she talked. "But it can rain or blow great guns and you never as much rise up to put the window down; you might think it was nailed up. Last night the rain poured in and soaked through to the hall ceiling and what Mrs. Hammond is go-

ing to say when she sees that, I don't know."

"We must have it repapered for her," said the doctor lazily. "Shirley lamb, there seems to be something wrong with your dress—what is that oozing out of your pocket?"

Winnie glanced at the discomfited Shirley.

"It's an egg—a fresh egg," she said resignedly. "I sent her out to get me one for the French toast and I suppose she forgot to give it to me. Never mind, Shirley, it's nothing to sit on an egg, dearie; the mother hen does it every day. For goodness' sake, what are you laughing at, Hughie?"

CHAPTER VI

WINNIE IS NERVOUS

WHEN Doctor Hugh went back to the Eastshore house Sunday night, in order to be ready for an early Monday morning appointment, he took his mother with him. There were several things which their brief residence at Rainbow Hill had demonstrated would be immediately required, noticeably more frocks for Sarah. That small girl tore and wore out and soiled an amazing number of dresses within a day. Winnie, too, had a list of necessities and Mrs. Willis had proposed that she go in with Hugh and gather frocks and utensils; then Hugh would bring them back in the car and her, too.

"You'll be alone only one night," Mrs. Willis said to Winnie. "And if you are the least bit nervous, I'm sure one of the boys will come up and sleep in the house."

"Now don't you worry about us," was Winnie's reply. "I guess I can take care of things all right. There's nothing to be afraid of—and

anyway I don't see that two women in a house makes it any safer than one."

Winnie, though she would have been the last to admit it, had been slightly timid at first about the sleeping arrangements. She had never lived in the country in her life and she privately thought the farm a lonely place, especially at night when, to quote her own words, "there was nothing nearer than the moon." As a matter of fact Rainbow Hill was not an isolated place at all, there were telephone connections to the outside world and a private system of communication with the tenant house. No one ever locked the house doors in that section and gradually Winnie's unexpressed fears wore away.

Mrs. Willis, in her wholesome nature, was seldom frightened and to her the country meant peace and seclusion. All the girls had been trained from babyhood to regard the dark as "kind to tired people" and each had been taught to go to bed alone as a matter of course. They had never been terrified by foolish stories and silly myths and so were not afraid. Rosemary could lock up a house as competently as the doctor and thought nothing of going downstairs after the lights were out for the night to see if a window catch had been fastened.

When bed-time came the night following the morning of Mrs. Willis' departure, Winnie was too proud to ask Warren or Richard to spend the night in the house. It is quite probable that either or both might have offered to stay, but they had returned late from a trip to Bennington and, driving into the barn at nine o'clock, had decided to go to bed early.

"Are you going to lock the doors?" asked Rosemary, turning on the piano bench in surprise as Winnie shut the front door with a bang and slid the heavy bolt and chain.

"I am that," said Winnie with emphasis. "I'm responsible for the rented stuff in this house and I don't aim to have any of Mrs. Hammond's furniture being carried off."

"Why Winnie, no one will take anything," remonstrated Rosemary. "Warren says doors are never locked in any of the farmhouses around here. There hasn't been a tramp seen this summer."

"And I don't intend to have the record broken—not by me," said Winnie, shutting the living-room windows with a bang and turning the catches. "I'm going out in the kitchen now and bolt that door."

Sarah and Shirley had been in bed for an

hour and there was only Rosemary to accompany the determined Winnie on her rounds. They made a thorough job of the locking up—Winnie by preference, Rosemary by compulsion—and then snapped off the lights and went upstairs together.

"I'll leave my door open to-night, Winnie," said Rosemary. "Then if you should want anything, you could call me."

"It's going to rain," replied Winnie absently. "The wind is rising, too. Don't let the ceiling get soaked again."

Rosemary kissed her good night—Winnie's arms had been the first to hold Rosemary when she was born—and went into her own pretty room.

She did not hurry over undressing and even attempted to read as she brushed her hair. Of course neither pleasure nor task went forward very smoothly, but Rosemary enjoyed the sensation of dawdling. She was not sleepy and it was pleasant to play that she was a lady of leisure. Then, before she was ready for bed, she must needs try her hair a new way and turn on all the lights in the room to get the effect.

"It will be so exciting," said Rosemary, staring with naive satisfaction at the pink-cheeked

girl in the white kimono who stared back at her from the glass, "it will be so exciting to go to dances and parties. If I ever get to high school, I'll be thankful, for then there is always something happening. I hope there's a dancing school that's some good in Eastshore this winter."

At last Rosemary was ready for bed. She pattered over and felt of the floor under the two screened windows—quite dry, so the rain, if there had been rain, had not beat in.

"But it isn't raining," said Rosemary to herself, snapping off the lights and trying to see out into the darkness. "When it rains we can hear it on the tin roof of the porch; it is only cloudy and windy."

Mindful of her promise to Winnie, she opened her door—though as a rule the Willis family slept with individual bedroom doors closed—and listened for a moment, peering into the shadowy hall. There was not a sound and no light shone under Winnie's door—it must be open and she was asleep.

"How the wind does blow!" said Rosemary, safe in bed, wondering if she ought to get up and pin the muslin curtains back for they fluttered madly.

Before she could act on this thought, she was asleep. How long she slept she did not know, but she woke to find Winnie standing beside the bed.

"Rosemary!" she whispered. "Rosemary! There's the most awful racket you ever heard!"

Rosemary sat up in bed and drew the blanket around her.

"What—what's the matter?" she stammered.

"Hush—don't wake up Shirley and start her crying," warned Winnie who looked taller than ever in the scant gray dressing gown she had pulled tightly about her. "Sarah wouldn't wake if the house caved in—there, do you hear that?"

Rosemary listened intently. She shook her head.

"I don't hear anything," she said.

"Then come out in the hall and you will," advised Winnie, stalking toward the door.

Rosemary followed sleepily. She didn't want to listen to noises and she couldn't help wishing that Winnie had been a little harder of hearing.

"There—hear that?" Winnie's tone was almost triumphant.

Through the whole house sounded a wail that rose as they listened and mounted to a shriek. In spite of her desire to remain cool and calm, Rosemary shivered.

"It woke me up," whispered Winnie fearfully. "I never, in all my born days, heard anything like it."

"What—what makes it?" said Rosemary.

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out," declared Winnie. I'm not afraid of anything, once I know what it is; but when I don't know the cause, I can be scared as well as the next one."

Winnie was perfectly sincere in this statement. She might have added that no matter how badly frightened she was, she could not be kept from making her investigations. Now she prepared to go downstairs by pressing the button that lighted both halls.

"Don't go down, Winnie," begged Rosemary. "I don't believe it's anything but the wind."

"We had a high wind one night when your mother was home and nothing made this kind of racket," was Winnie's retort. "You sit at the top of the stairs, Rosemary, and you can see me all the time and you won't feel alone; there's no use in you prowling around just because I do."

"Hark—it's raining!" Rosemary had heard the sound of drops on the tin roof of the porch.

"I'm coming down with you, Winnie—wouldn't it be nice if only Hugh were here!"

The wail sounded again, low and hesitating, then it began to rise. As Winnie and Rosemary reached the level of the first floor hall the peak of the shriek sounded in their ears.

"Oh, don't go out in the kitchen!" Rosemary's voice shook with nervousness. "Winnie, don't go fussing around; come back in my room and sleep with me. We can't hear anything there."

"I aim to find out what—" began Winnie, then stopped suddenly.

Someone was coming up the narrow flagged walk, someone who was whistling softly.

"Hello!" came a low-voiced hail. "Hello—don't be frightened—this is Warren and Rich. Anything the matter?"

Rosemary promptly turned and fled and then, the second floor gained, turned and hung over the railing to watch Winnie unchain and unbolt and unlock the front door and then admit two dripping, but cheerful figures, in yellow oilskins.

"Raining and blowing great guns," said Warren's voice. "We got up to close one of the windows and saw your house lighted—thought maybe someone was sick."

"You're the best boys who ever breathed," the grateful Winnie informed them. "Nothing's the matter except I'm trying to find out what makes—that! Listen!"

"You've left the upstair doors open," said Richard promptly. "There's something about the way this house is constructed that does it. Whenever there's a wind of any account, all the second story doors have to be closed; it's the one drawback. I suppose Mrs. Hildreth didn't think to tell you."

"We left our doors open to-night, because we're lonely without Mrs. Willis," was Winnie's simple explanation. "Rosemary was down with me, but she left when she heard you—I daresay she's listening up in the hall now."

"Of course I am," said Rosemary. "Ask Warren and Richard to stay, Winnie; there is the guest room all ready."

"You go up and go to bed this minute," commanded Winnie, whose invitations, like the queen's, usually brooked no refusal. "Now I know the wind makes that howl, I'm not the least bit nervous, but I'd rather have someone around to ask in case something else turns up."

Nothing more of a disturbing nature "turned up" that night and the household settled down

and slept peacefully, secure in the knowledge that very real protection, in the persons of the two husky lads, was close at hand. Winnie summoned them at five o'clock the next morning—knowing that Mr. Hildreth would not easily forgive a delayed morning start—and actually had coffee and her famous waffles ready for them at that hour.

"Send for us any time," grinned Warren when he saw the table set.

"Any time you need aid, Winnie—or plan to serve waffles."

CHAPTER VII

AN ADVENTURE FOR SARAH

"DO you have to work all the time?" asked Sarah plaintively.

She sat on the top of a fence rail and, her feet hooked around the next bar, was placidly, if precariously, watching Richard Gilbert tinkering with a cultivator that had developed a sudden "kink."

"Well, summer is the time to work, on a farm," Richard answered good-naturedly. "You have to cultivate the corn when there is corn to cultivate, Sarah."

Sarah nodded, her eyes on the horse which stood patiently waiting.

"He's shivering," she said. "Look—see him shiver, Rich. And it is just as hot!"

"That isn't shivering," replied Richard, glancing up from the wheel in his hand. "Solomon is twitching to shake a fly off—that's all."

"Did he shake it off?" demanded Sarah with interest.

"I suppose so," answered Richard absently, searching for a screw he had dropped in the dirt.

"I could get the fly batter and swat flies for Solomon," suggested Sarah. "He'd like that, wouldn't he? I could ride on his back and hit all the flies, Rich."

"Yes, that sounds like a good scheme," admitted Richard cautiously, "but something tells me it wouldn't work. If you didn't frighten Solomon into fits, or start him galloping, or fall off and break your neck, you'd be sure to distract me from the work in hand and then Mr. Hildreth would want to know why I hadn't finished the corn. I'm afraid, Sarah, Sol will have to worry along in the same old way. The flies aren't bad to-day, anyway."

"Yes they are, he's twitching again," said Sarah. "He ought to wear a window screen—or something."

She was secretly relieved that her swatter plan had not been accepted, for she had a marked aversion to killing flies. Indeed many a royal battle had she waged with Winnie over the matter of killing flies that found their way into the house; Sarah, left alone, would slowly and painfully have captured each fly alive and unharmed and given him his freedom via the front door.

"Horses sometimes wear nets—or they used to when they were used for driving," explained Richard, beginning to pound the wheel in place. "As a horse ran or trotted, the net bobbled up and down and was supposed to keep the flies off; that wouldn't be any use when a horse is walking slowly around a field. A blanket would keep them away from Solomon, of course, but he'd die with the heat."

"I'll invent something for him," said Sarah comfortably.

"Where are the other girls?" asked Richard hastily.

A few weeks' acquaintance with Sarah had already taught him the expediency of keeping her in action. Sarah on the move might do some very startling things but a contemplative Sarah presented possibilities that were limitless.

"Hugh came and took Rosemary and Shirley with him," answered the small girl balancing on the fence. "I didn't want to go. I don't like automobiles much. When I grow up, I'm going to have a hundred horses and pigs and cows and everything."

"That'll be fine," Richard approved. "There now, I think that will work. Have to be moving on, Sarah; you going to wait for me to come round again?"

"No, that isn't any fun," said Sarah with more frankness than politeness. "Guess I'll go out to the orchard."

"Don't go through the upper field," commanded Richard, gathering up the lines.

Sarah scrambled down from the fence and reached for Solomon's glossy black tail.

"Why not?" she asked suspiciously.

"Because Mr. Hildreth turned the old ram out to pasture there this morning, that's why," said Richard. "Here, what are you trying to do?"

Sarah had grasped a handful of the horse's tail and was pulling on it wildly. Old Solomon turned his head around and stared at her reproachfully.

"I want to get enough hairs to make a ring," explained Sarah. "The washwoman is going to show me how next time she comes, but she said I had to get the hair."

"How many do you think you need?" said Richard, laughing as he released the tail from the covetous clutch of the small fingers. "You won't want more than half a dozen as long as these; Solomon thought you meant to pull his tail out by the roots, didn't you, Boy?"

"I didn't mean to hurt him," apologized the somewhat abashed Sarah. "What's a ram?"

"His other name is Mr. Sheep," said Richard, handing her half a dozen long black wiry hairs. "And he's old and cross and has been known to butt people. I don't think he'd hurt you, but he might frighten you."

"I wouldn't be afraid," boasted Sarah, stuffing her horse hairs carefully into the pocket of her middy blouse. "Shirley might, but I wouldn't. Shall I bring you a sweet apple, Rich?"

"If you find any," he said, swinging the cultivator back into place and clucking to Solomon to go ahead. "I can't eat green rocks, you know, and you shouldn't."

Sarah, in spite of warnings and orders, insisted on trying to eat everything in the shape of an apple that tumbled to the ground under the orchard trees. No fruit was too green for her palate, no round, bullet-like sphere too hard for her small white teeth.

She crawled through the fence now, waved a farewell to Richard, who was well on his way to the corner of the cornfield, and trotted off to search the orchard for spoils.

Sarah amused herself without much trouble—"though as much can't be said for the rest of us," Winnie had once remarked when Sarah's

efforts to entertain herself had involved the entire family in explanations with nervous neighbors who objected to tame white mice—and the life at Rainbow Hill suited her exactly. She not only visited the horses and cows and pigs regularly, made friends with the flock of sheep and claimed to know every fowl in the poultry yard by name and sight, but she had a tender word for every bug, spider and grasshopper she met. Little water snakes were Sarah's delight and not even the ants and worms were beneath her notice and affection. Truly, as Doctor Hugh said, Sarah was certainly intended to live in the country.

"I'd like to see a ram," she said to herself as she scrambled up the bank to the orchard. "I never saw one. It wouldn't do any harm to go around the upper pasture and look in."

But she had a number of things to do in the orchard first. Sarah was noted for her thoroughness in whatever she undertook and now her heart was set on finding an apple soft enough for Richard Gilbert to eat—and just a plain apple for Miss Sarah Willis. Alas, Mrs. Hildreth had been out earlier in the day and had carefully picked up every windfall. She and Winnie were adepts at making delicious apple

sauce and the first summer apples were scarce enough to be carefully hunted for.

So, though Sarah went the rounds of every tree and even shook one or two cautiously (Mr. Hildreth had intimated that he would "shake" anyone detected trying to knock down green apples or pears and Sarah had a wholesome respect for his mandates, so far) but she was forced to go appleless.

"I think I'd better go look at my apple seed I planted," said Sarah aloud.

She had borrowed the coal shovel from Winnie a few days previous and with much effort and earnestness, had planted a plump seed from an apple in a sunny, open space in the orchard. The apple was exceedingly green, but aside from doubtful fertility, the seed was doomed never to sprout because of the overwhelming curiosity of its small planter. Sarah had "looked" at that seed each day since planting it.

"If all these trees didn't grow any faster than my seed," mourned Sarah, scratching around in the soil with an oyster shell, the shovel having been confiscated by Winnie, "I don't see how people get any apples to eat."

Then a large—a very large—black ant hurrying up the trunk of a young pear tree, caught

her eye and she stopped to study him. She thought for a moment of writing her name and address on a piece of paper and tying it to him so that at some distant date, say a hundred years ahead, another little girl might find the ant and read that Sarah had also known him.

"If a turtle lives sixty years, why can't an ant live a hundred?" Sarah asked the black crow who sat on a branch and stared at her. "Only, I haven't any paper or pencil or thread to tie it on with—so I'll wait."

With this sensible conclusion she turned her attention to the swing Warren had put up for her and Shirley on a conveniently low limb of an apple tree. Sarah did not swing sedately—she must do that as she did everything else, fast and furiously. She took out the notched board that served as a seat and stood up in the loop, jerking herself forward and backward until she attained the desired speed. Swooping down in one of these mad rushes, she caught sight of something moving in the next field.

"There's the ram!" she thought. "I'll go see what he looks like"; and jumping out of the swing she ran over to the wire fence that enclosed the orchard on three sides.

"He doesn't look cross—you're not, are you?"

said Sarah, addressing the Roman-nosed wooly creature that stood gravely regarding her.

The flock of sheep were up at the other end of the field and the ram stood alone. Perhaps he had glimpsed the flashing of Sarah's frock through the trees as she swung and had come down to see what made the fluttering. Sarah was quite enchanted with him and thought he looked lonely.

She dropped to her knees and crawled through the fence, holding back the heavy wire strands with difficulty, and sat down on the grass to pull up her socks, brush her hair out of her eyes and tuck in a handful of gathers at her waistline where her skirt had torn loose from the band.

Having made herself neat for the introduction, Sarah advanced fearlessly to greet the ram. To her surprise he came toward her with lowered head, and something in his wicked little eyes made her uneasy. The next thing she knew, she felt a terrific impact against her legs and down she went with a thud. She had presence enough of mind to roll over and she kept rolling, in a frantic instinct to get out of the way of that powerful head. Dizzy and shaken—for she had fallen heavily—she scrambled to her feet and

began to run, the ram coming after her valiantly.

"Rosemary! Mother! Rich—Rich! Warren!" screamed poor Sarah, running as she had never run before, "Rich! Rich!"

It was Warren who heard her and reached her first. He had been working in the tomato field which was near the orchard and he had no horse to consider—Richard could not abandon Solomon in the middle of the cornfield. Warren ran in the direction of the cries and, leaping the dividing fence, came to the rescue. The ram stopped short as soon as he saw him and Sarah fled straight into Warren's protecting arms.

"There, there, you're all right—you couldn't run like that if you were hurt," he soothed her. "Don't cry, Sarah—see, here comes your Mother; you've frightened her. And Winnie, too! Look up and smile and wave your hand—don't let your mother be frightened, Sarah."

Mrs. Willis had heard Sarah's shrieks and now she was running across the field, Winnie imploring her to walk at every step.

"She isn't hurt!" called Warren, trying to relieve the mother's anxiety at once. "She's all right, Mrs. Willis."

And then Sarah gained her vocal powers of which, till this minute, she had been deprived. Fright and running had taken her breath and she almost choked with the effort to articulate. Lifted high in Warren's arms, the tears running down her face, Sarah managed to put her chief sorrow into words that reached her mother and Winnie half way across the pasture and Richard just breathlessly rounding the orchard.

"I lost my horse hairs!" screamed Sarah.

CHAPTER VIII

STORM SIGNALS

ROSEMARY, seated on the lowest porch step, was outwardly "cool and calm and collected," to borrow one of Winnie's favorite phrases. She was dressed all in white and Doctor Hugh, coming from the shed where he had put his car, noted appreciatively what a lovely dash of color the blue wool she was knitting made in the picture. It just matched her eyes, he thought.

"Hello, sweetheart!" he greeted her, and then, as she raised her face to kiss him, "why, what's the matter?"

For the blue eyes were mutinous and stormy and it was easy to see that Rosemary was unhappy.

"Oh, Hugh! Don't go in right away—I never get a chance to talk to you," she said, moving over to give him room to sit on the step. "Everyone will have a thousand things to tell you—it was that way last Sunday. I suppose

if we see you only once a week, or every other week, it's natural, but I wish I could ever talk to you without Shirley or Sarah asking you questions at the same time."

Doctor Hugh laughed as he took off his hat and dropped down beside his sister.

"Seems to me you have a good deal of energy for such a warm day," he commented, running his fingers through his thick dark hair. "Doesn't that breeze feel good, though! Eastshore has been becalmed this week and the dust from the plastering has settled on everything in the house —I'm glad Mother can't see it. And where is Mother, Rosemary?"

"Lying down," answered Rosemary, beginning to purl. "She didn't expect you for an hour. Sarah and Shirley went to town with Warren—he had to go over and get a bolt or something, so Mother let them go. How far has Mr. Greggs got with the building, Hugh?"

"Well, you know he isn't naturally swift," said the doctor cautiously, "and he and his helper have more labor troubles than any union I ever heard of—they differ continuously. But I will say that the lawn is piled high with lumber and bricks and I never come home at night that I don't have to chase a dozen boys away—kids

who think I'm a grouch because I won't have them breaking their necks at my front door. Jack Welles says I ought to take patients wherever I find them and not be too particular."

"Tell me about Jack," Rosemary said, smiling.

"Jack is the same old Jack," declared the doctor. "He works in the garden, when his father makes him, and he goes fishing as often as the law allows. I believe he and half a dozen of the high school boys are going camping next week and Jack is counting on coming up here in August when I take my two weeks off. He's determined to work—asked me to speak to Mr. Hildreth about a job while I am here."

"Warren and Richard will be glad, if he does come," asserted Rosemary. "They think Mr. Hildreth ought to have another man all the time —Warren was grumbling because he had to go after the bolt this afternoon; he said it would put him back two hours."

The doctor watched the busy needles clicking placidly for several minutes. Then—

"And now, as we feel a little more serene," he said quietly, "suppose you tell me what was the trouble when I came."

"The trouble?" fenced Rosemary. "What trouble?"

"She thinks she can fool me," said Doctor Hugh, apparently addressing his remark to the solitary white hen that wandered around a bush on the lawn at that moment. "She thinks I don't know the signals—those famous storm signals. She thinks I didn't know the moment I looked at her that she wanted something she couldn't have."

"I had—an argument," admitted Rosemary with hot cheeks. "It was all Winnie's fault."

"Yes?" said her brother politely.

"It was, Hugh, honestly it was. Winnie is as good as gold, but I do wish she wouldn't try to look after me, as she calls it. I can look after myself. Mother would let me do lots of things, if it wasn't for Winnie."

"Here, here, you'll have to take out all that knitting, if you're not careful," warned the doctor, for the blue eyes were stormy again and Rosemary was knitting furiously. "What was this particular argument about?"

"I want to sleep outdoors," explained Rosemary. "I could take out a quilt and spread it on the grass and a blanket to cover me—I've never done it and it would be such fun. And Winnie says if I must be crazy can't I wait till I get back to Eastshore? As if anyone ever slept

out on the grass in town where everyone can see you!"

"No, that wouldn't be exactly the thing to do," agreed Doctor Hugh, his lips twitching. "Well, Rosemary?"

"First Mother said I could, and then, after Winnie had talked to her, she said she thought it wouldn't be best," reported Rosemary. "Winnie told her a cow might step on me—and all the cows are in the barnyard or the pasture at six o'clock and never get out!—or, she said, someone might come and carry me off! And where would I be, while they were carrying me?" demanded Rosemary with intense scorn. "I'd like to see anyone carry me off!"

"I hope this 'argument' didn't degenerate into a clash," said the doctor seriously. "You know how it tires Mother to have to hear these quarrels, Rosemary, and to be constantly called upon to act as arbitrator."

"I banged the door," confessed Rosemary. "I can't help it, Hugh, I always lose my temper when I argue. And Winnie kept saying the same thing a hundred times—I don't see why I shouldn't sleep outdoors, do you?"

"If mother has said 'no,' there's one hard and fast reason," pronounced her brother. "But I

believe in the value of experience as a teacher, especially for strong-willed little girls who are slow to learn that their own way isn't the best in the world. Good gracious, that isn't Sarah, is it?"

He broke off abruptly as an energetic figure advanced toward him, waving two small hands black with grease, in welcome. It was Sarah, a Sarah whose socks were down to her ankles and whose dress was torn and spotted with the same black grease that liberally anointed her face as well as her hands. Her dark, straight hair straggled into her eyes and there was a large bump on her forehead that evidently gave her little concern.

Behind her trotted Shirley, a little less dishevelled, a little less dirty and quite as radiantly content.

"You look nice," said Rosemary severely. "I should have thought Warren would have been ashamed to ride home with you—where is he? I didn't see the wagon drive past."

"Mr. Hildreth made him turn into the field, without going to the barn," explained Sarah, standing at a safe distance from Doctor Hugh who would, she was sure, see the bump even under a layer of dirt. "We had lots of fun,

Rosemary; the wheel came off and I helped Warren put it on again."

"And I had a chocolate ice cream cone," said Shirley, standing on tip-toe to kiss her brother and leaving small finger marks on his collar as visible marks of her affection.

"I'd better go and get washed up," announced Sarah blandly, though to her hearers' knowledge this was the first time on record she had made such a suggestion voluntarily.

"Come here, Sarah," said Doctor Hugh quietly, "I want to look at that bruise on your forehead."

"That isn't anything," Sarah assured him, backing off.

"Come here and let me see it," the doctor repeated and, as Sarah reluctantly approached him, "how did you get it?"

"I was under the wagon," said Sarah, wincing slightly as Doctor Hugh felt of the bruise with firm, practised fingers, "and I heard Warren coming and I jumped up and hit my head."

She did not think it necessary to add that Warren had requested her to stay in the road and not crawl under the broken wagon.

"All right, the skin isn't broken," announced the doctor. "But it aches a little doesn't it, dear?"

"A little," nodded Sarah, winking to keep back the tears.

He put an arm around her, heedless of the dirt and grease.

"That won't last long," he promised, "and if you and Shirley will go in and get washed and dressed without dawdling, I'll take you for a little drive before dinner."

"Rosemary, too?" asked Shirley, balancing like a butterfly on the top step.

"Rosemary, too."

Forgetting her aching bump, Sarah followed Shirley into the house with a shout, and the sound of their feet clattering up the open stairway proclaimed their intentions of not wasting a minute.

"Here comes Mrs. Hildreth," said Rosemary in a low voice. "I wish I could fix her just once —she doesn't know how to be pretty."

Rosemary, with uncanny penetration, had hit upon the truth. Mrs. Hildreth did not know how to be pretty. She would have said she had not the time to "fuss with her looks," but it would have taken little extra time to have done her really abundant hair in a becoming style instead of the tight knot into which she invariably twisted it. And surely, if she could don that

clean, starched dark calico dress in five minutes, it would have taken no longer to put on a pretty light-colored frock.

"I thought your brother would be out to spend Sunday," said Mrs. Hildreth capably, in her high-pitched, nervous voice, "so I brought up two extra bunches of asparagus. Winnie told me the doctor liked it."

"Winnie has my likes and dislikes down pat," declared Doctor Hugh, rising and shaking hands. "Will you come in, Mrs. Hildreth? My mother will be down in a minute."

Rosemary took the asparagus and seconded the invitation.

"No, thanks, I can't stay," said Mrs. Hildreth, rather regretfully. "I have to tend to the chickens and get the milk pans and strainers ready and do a lot of little chores before I get supper. You use your porch a lot, don't you?"

"Yes," said Rosemary who, she had once told her mother, always felt as though Mrs. Hildreth's sharp eyes condemned her as lazy. "We all love to be out of doors."

"I'm outdoors most of the time," said Mrs. Hildreth, "but I don't have time to sit on the porch, unless it is Sunday afternoons."

She went back to her work and Rosemary, re-

turning from delivering the asparagus to Winnie, found her mother and an immaculate Sarah and Shirley entertaining Doctor Hugh. He brought the car around presently and they went for the promised drive to Bennington, the pretty county seat, and back.

After dinner that evening Rosemary, quite restored to good humor, was surprised to have a question put to her.

"How would you like to try sleeping outdoors to-night, Rosemary?" asked Doctor Hugh placidly.

CHAPTER IX

ONE WISH COMES TRUE

ROSEMARY answered her brother's question characteristically.

"Oh, Hugh! I'd love to."

"Well, don't tell Sarah or Shirley," he cautioned, "because I don't want a riot—wait till they have gone to bed and then at nine o'clock, if you really want to try the experiment, you may."

"Won't Mother care?" asked Rosemary doubtfully.

"I've talked it over with Mother, and she is willing to let you try the plan while I am here," said the doctor. "It is a clear warm night and too early in the season for heavy dews, so there could not be a better time. You'd find it harder to go to sleep if there were a moon, so that's in your favor, too."

"I wouldn't want to sleep outdoors on a moonlight night," declared Rosemary decidedly. "Old Fiddlestrings—Warren says everyone

calls him that—would be walking up and down the road, playing the 'Serenade.' I'd rather sleep outdoors in the dark—as soon as you are used to it, it isn't dark at all and I love to see the stars."

It seemed to Rosemary that Sarah and Shirley must have turned back the hands of the clock to delay their bed hour. They monopolized their brother, seated on either side of him in the porch swing while the summer dusk slowly deepened and Mrs. Willis rested in the big chair which had an arm strong and broad enough to hold Rosemary who knitted with outward calm and inward fever. Were those children never going to bed?

Winnie had gone over to the bungalow with Mrs. Hildreth, who was delighted to have someone with whom to exchange household lore, and Warren and Richard had tactfully betaken themselves to Bennington, knowing instinctively that Doctor Hugh would like to have his family to himself for one brief evening, after a week's separation.

"Too dark to knit, Rosemary," he said at last. "And don't turn on the light, dear; can't you be content to do nothing for a little while?"

"Time for bed, Shirley," announced Mrs.

Willis. "Run along and see how nearly undressed you can be before Mother comes up."

Shirley obediently clambered down and looked at them wistfully. Her bed hour was half-past seven and Sarah had the privilege of staying up till eight o'clock. She clung jealously to this prerogative and as a rule nothing would induce her to go to bed when Shirley did. She might fall asleep on sofa or rug, but she would protest vigorously, if sent upstairs before the eight strokes of the clock were heard. Thirty minutes at bed-time marked the difference to Sarah between six and nine years old.

"I'll come up with you to-night, honey," said Doctor Hugh. "I don't believe I've forgotten how to put you to bed. Sit still, Mother."

"Are you going to tell a story, Hugh?" asked Sarah anxiously. "Are you, Hugh?"

"Will you, Hugh?" begged Shirley. "Tell about the little boy in the hospital who wouldn't eat his supper? Will you, Hugh?"

"All right, I will," promised the doctor, "if you'll march upstairs this minute."

"I'm coming, too," announced Sarah. "I was up early this morning, wasn't I, Mother?"

"Yes indeed you were," agreed her mother, catching her as she scrambled past and holding

her tightly—Sarah usually had to be caught or pursued if one wanted to kiss her. "Kiss Mother good night, dearest."

Mrs. Willis understood perfectly that Sarah was saving her pride when she spoke of being up early that morning—some excuse had to be made to explain her willingness to go to bed when Shirley did.

"If Sarah had known I'm going to sleep outdoors to-night, she would have been wild to come, too," said Rosemary, when she and her mother were left alone.

"Are you sure you want to try it, dear?" asked Mrs. Willis.

"Why Mother, I've always wanted to sleep outdoors!" cried Rosemary earnestly. "I'm so tired of ordinary beds and houses—and—and things. It will be perfectly lovely to lie under a tree and see the stars over my head and pretend I am out on the desert. I'd like to sleep outdoors every night."

When Doctor Hugh came down to report that both little girls were asleep, he found his mother and sister knitting under the shaded porch light.

"I don't approve of night work for women," he informed them gravely. "Especially for those who have had as active a day as you have

had. You don't want to knit, do you, Mother?"

She put down her work at once and smiled.

"I'll play for you," she said quickly and went in to the piano.

Doctor Hugh sat down in the swing and patted the pillows invitingly. Rosemary, fastening her needles securely in place, put down her work a little reluctantly and crossed over to the swing. But when he put his arm about her and she leaned back against the cushions, her head on his comfortable shoulder, she gave a little tired sigh of relief. A big brother was nice!

And as the music drifted out to them—all the sweet old melodies the doctor loved best, played as only Mrs. Willis could play them—Rosemary felt her impatience and hurry slipping away. She who had been so eager to have nine o'clock come, so anxious to get the evening over so that she might be free to put her wish into practise, began to wish that she could stay up later than usual.

"Ten minutes after nine," said Doctor Hugh, all too soon. "I must help you get your sleeping outfit together."

"Oh, I'll just take a quilt and spread it out and then roll myself up in it," planned Rosemary.

But Doctor Hugh insisted on a rubber sheet, to go under the heavy quilt and insure positive protection from dampness; and blankets, he declared, would be indispensable. He arranged the quilt under a maple tree—the tree most distant from the house—which was Rosemary's choice, carried out a pair of light blankets and parried Winnie's volley of questions good-naturedly when she came in from visiting Mrs. Hildreth and discovered what he was doing.

"Well, Rosemary, I see you're going to have your own way and I only hope you don't regret it," was Winnie's greeting when Rosemary danced out, a dark kimono over her gown and moccasins on her feet.

"I won't," Rosemary replied confidently.

"Of course I won't," she said to herself stoutly, when she was curled up on a quilt, under the blankets. "This is heaps of fun!"

She could see the light from the porch lamp which made a golden shaft through the wire netting into the darkness of the night. Over her head the stars twinkled and the leafy branches of the maple spread out like a network.

Pouf!—Rosemary scrambled to her feet, brushing at her face frantically.

"Something fell on me!" she gasped. "A bug —I'm almost sure it was a bug!"

But after feeling around on the quilt and finding nothing that felt like a bug, she decided that after all it might have been a leaf. She didn't mind the thought of a leaf tumbling down on her nose, so she carefully smoothed out the tumbled quilt, shook the blanket and laid them straight and went to bed again.

Usually she fell asleep readily, but to-night she did not feel sleepy.

"I wonder what time it is?" she meditated, turning sideways so that if another leaf—or bug —should drop it would not fall on her face. "I wish I'd brought my little clock."

Presently she heard the sound of horse's hoofs on the road, soon saw the winking white light turn into the drive that led to the barn. She watched it moving slowly forward, saw it stop and knew that Richard and Warren were harnessing outside the barn. In another moment the light flickered out as Warren backed the runabout into the shed and Richard led the horse to a stall. The hollow echo of the barn door as Richard slammed and bolted it, came next. She thought she could see the dim outline of two figures walking toward the bungalow but that might have been imagination.

Rosemary sighed and twisted about uneasily

to face the other way. The porch light was out! That meant her mother and Hugh had gone to bed and she was utterly alone on the lawn. She felt inexplicably abandoned—Hugh might have whistled to her, to see if she were asleep, before he turned off the light. That, thought Rosemary, would not have been much to do.

She decided to lie flat on her back for a while. In that position she might begin to feel sleepy. It was not a pitch-black night, indeed the darkness seemed half luminous—the kind of light in which, after the eyes have grown accustomed to it, it is possible to make out the outlines of objects quite plainly. Rosemary knew she could not be mistaken when she saw a shadowy form on the other side of the lawn.

She sat up with a jerk, staring. Yes, something was certainly moving. Frantically she recalled her arguments that all animals slept at night. How foolish she had been to advance a statement of that sort. Vividly now she remembered stories heard and read of night marauders —foxes, weasels—skunks! These prowled about at night and she wouldn't care to come in contact with any of them.

"Snakes!" whispered Rosemary with a sud-

den prickling of her scalp. "Do they go around at night, I wonder? Sarah would know."

But Sarah, the naturalist, was safely asleep in her own bed. Rosemary suddenly envied both her sisters. She remembered that Mrs. Hildreth had spoken of the warfare she waged against rats which tried to carry off the young poultry at night—Rosemary, in imagination, could picture a procession of rats running over her as she slept, on their way to the hen houses.

She got gingerly to her feet, straining her eyes to see the moving object. What could it be? Something brushed past her, close to her face. Instantly Winnie's horror of bats came to the girl's nervous mind.

"If the screen door is unlocked, I'm going in," whispered Rosemary, gathering her kimono tightly about her. "Sarah may like animals but I don't."

She started as the mournful cry of a hoot owl sounded in the distance—and then something cold and wet touched her hand! With one bound Rosemary cleared the quilt and ran like a deer across the grass. The shadowy object she had seen came toward her, moving slowly. Rosemary dodged, tripped on her kimono and fell.

She was up again in a moment and running

again, her breath coming in little sobbing gasps. Jack Welles had once said that she did not "happen to be the screaming kind of girl" and though terrified now she made no outcry. She gained the porch step, tugged frantically at the screen door and felt it open in her grasp. She pitched forward, striking her knee against a chair and felt herself caught in a strong, firm clasp. For a moment she struggled furiously and silently and then realization came to her.

"Oh, Hugh!" she cried. "Hugh! There's something out there!"

CHAPTER X

AN EVENTFUL DAY

DOCTOR HUGH snapped on the porch lamp, carefully turning the shade to shield Rosemary's eyes from the sudden light. He was fully dressed and had evidently been dozing in the swing.

"Hush—don't wake Mother!" he said warningly. "What frightened you, dear?"

Rosemary's face was quite white and her wide, startled eyes gave eloquent testimony that she had been alarmed.

"Something wet touched me—wet and cold," she whispered. "And there was something else moving around, too. I ran as fast as I could."

"Some of the farm animals out for a stroll," said Doctor Hugh with a quiet assurance that his sister found most comforting. "What do you say to going to bed now, dear, and investigating in the morning?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Rosemary. "Is it nearly morning, Hugh?"

The doctor consulted his watch.

"It is just eleven o'clock," he said quietly. "Try not to make a noise as you go upstairs for I hope Mother is asleep. I'll turn the lamp so that it will light you as far as the landing."

So she had been out there only two hours, thought Rosemary as she tumbled into her own bed. Two hours!

"It seemed like two years!" she murmured, drifting off into a peaceful sleep almost instantly.

She woke in the morning to find the others downstairs, breakfast over and all traces of her couch under the maple tree removed.

"I know Hugh did that," she said to herself gratefully as she dressed. Her first act had been to run to the window to see if the quilt was spread out on the grass. "He'll never give me away, either. And I know, too, he would have stayed out on the porch all night, if I hadn't come in, just so he would be on hand to help me when I needed him. Hugh is so dear to me!"

She said something of this to him late that afternoon, following him out to the barn when he went to get the car, preparatory to making the trip back to Eastshore. Sarah and Shirley had remained in ignorance of the brief experi-

ment and Winnie had proved extremely tactful, asking no questions at all. Rosemary had learned, from the conversation of Warren and Richard, that a cow had strayed from the pasture and a blind old sheep had cropped the grass all night. It had been the wet nose of the cow that touched her hand and she had clumsily dodged the sheep.

"You're so good, Hugh," said Rosemary, pretending to polish the foredoor handle. "But I won't want to sleep outdoors ever again—did you know I wouldn't?"

Doctor Hugh smiled a little.

"We'll all go camping some day and you'll 'love' sleeping outdoors, as you say," he declared. "My dear little sister, I would be the last person to try to discourage you in that effort. But Mother knew and Winnie knew and I knew that, for a number of reasons, it isn't practical for you to try to sleep outdoors here; neither practical nor necessary. It wasn't a matter of sleeping outdoors, Rosemary—it was just the same old question, 'Why can't I have my own way?' Now wasn't it?"

Rosemary blushed, but her eyes met his honestly.

"Yes, I guess it was," she admitted. "But

I'm sorry I was so obstinate—truly I am, Hugh."

Doctor Hugh leaned forward from behind the wheel and kissed her.

"You'll make the Willis will an aid and not a hindrance yet," he declared. "All I want to do, dear, is to save you from learning these lessons the most painful way. Hop in and I'll drive you around to the house," he added cheerfully.

The next morning was naturally a most busy one at Rainbow Hill. Monday morning is apt to be a busy time anywhere, but Mrs. Hildreth, who would sooner have dreamed of starting the day without breakfast than starting the week without washing, saw to it that not one idle moment was unaccounted for as far as her jurisdiction extended. She rose at four, instead of the customary five, and Warren and Richard, alternating, helped her with filling and emptying the tubs and lifting the heavy boiler. Mrs. Hildreth scorned the modern washing machine and did her clothes in the old-fashioned laborious way.

Winnie had a woman to help her wash—a Mrs. Pritchard who cheerfully walked two miles each way—but the temptation to bleach the household linens on the lawn in the hot sunshine

appealed powerfully to the housewifely instincts of Winnie, and Mrs. Willis declared that she washed everything she came to, regardless of its state of cleanliness. Certainly one would have thought that her normal wash of light summer dresses for three girls and two women would have contented Winnie, but the combination of soft water, soap, floods of sunshine and the washing machine left by Mrs. Hammond proved well nigh irresistible to Winnie. She may have been said to fairly revel in wash.

"Let's go wading, Rosemary," coaxed Shirley this Monday morning, soon after breakfast.

"I can't—not now," said Rosemary. "I want to help Mother first and then I must practise. Ask Sarah."

"Sarah's cross," complained Shirley. "She brought the cat in from the barn and put her to sleep in the clothes basket and Winnie tipped her out."

"Yes, that would make Sarah cross," agreed Rosemary. "Where is she now?"

"I don't know," said Shirley and her tone indicated that she didn't particularly care. "Come on and let's go wading, Rosemary."

"Rosemary is going to make the beds for Mother," interposed Mrs. Willis. "Winnie is

so busy this morning she hasn't time. Don't you want to pick up the papers on the porch, Shirley, and put the cushions straight in the swing and bring in some fresh flowers for the glass jar? Then, when you have it all in order, I'll come out there and sit and make a new dress for your doll."

"Oh, yes, that will be nice!" beamed Shirley, trotting off busily.

In all that hive of industry, represented by the farm, Sarah was the one idle figure. She sat on the fence commanding a view of the pig pen—not the pleasantest prospect Rainbow Hill afforded, it must be confessed—and dangled her feet moodily. She was still resentful at the summary ejection of the barn cat from the clothes basket and, in addition, had been worsted in an argument with Warren whose turn it was to cultivate the corn. Sarah had wished to ride on the cultivator, preferably in the driver's seat or, failing that, on the horse's back. Warren had endeavored to dissuade her as tactfully as possible but finding that tact made small impression on Sarah, had been obliged to come out with a flat refusal.

"What a funny chicken!" said Sarah aloud, turning her attention from the grunting pigs be-

fore her to a solitary chicken behind her, a feat which nearly cost her her balance.

"I do b'lieve it's sick!" she declared, jumping down and walking over to the limp-looking fowl which stared at her coldly from a glassy eye.

Sarah, in the few weeks she had spent on the farm, had really learned a good deal about the care of the stock. To her natural love for animals and aptitude for handling them, she had added a store of knowledge gleaned by asking questions of the boys and Mr. Hildreth and observing them as they went about the barns. She had faithfully tagged Mrs. Hildreth, who took care of the poultry too, and had often seen her pick up a chicken and examine it.

So now she picked up the apathetic bird and felt of his crop with exploring little brown fingers.

"You're hungry, I'll bet," she informed him. "You probably didn't feel well this morning and the other hens knocked you away from the corn. Don't you care, I'll get you some breakfast, all for yourself."

Sarah knew where the grain bins were in the barn and she went in and opened them all. Using her dress as an apron she selected a handful of wheat, another of cracked corn, some

buckwheat, a generous scoop of "middlings" and a double handful of the meat scraps bought especially for the ducks. Then out she dashed and spread the feast before the hen who really did brighten up and eat a good deal of the grain. No one hen could have eaten it all—and survived—and of course the other chickens spied the feast in time, but not before the invalid had been revived somewhat.

"Now I'll put you in a coop till you feel better," said Sarah, "so nothing can pick on you."

She stuffed her patient into one of the feeding coops in the poultry yard, gave her a pan of water and then, feeling more cheerful herself, decided to go wading.

She glanced toward the house, reflected that if she went back to get Shirley her mother might object to the wading plan or, worse yet, Winnie set her at some useful task, and made up her mind to amuse herself alone.

"Going wading?" called Warren cheerfully, as she skirted the cornfield where he sat on the swaying cultivator pulled by the plodding Solomon, both horse and boy protected from the blazing sun by straw hats.

Sarah refused to reply. She had no intention

of resuming friendly intercourse so soon after the painful episode of the morning.

"He needn't think he can boss me," she scolded, sitting down by the brook to take off her shoes and stockings. "Ow, the water's cold!"

Like a great many older people, Sarah preferred to think a long time before she committed herself to an icy flood. She tucked her feet under her comfortably and gave herself up to thought.

In the grass beside her a hundred busy little ants ran to and fro and Sarah's speculations led her to wonder whether they had ever made a trip by water.

"I'll build them a little boat," she planned, "and give them a little ride."

Actuated by the kindest of motives, she fashioned a rude sort of ferry boat from a leaf and then spent twenty minutes catching passengers for it. In her energy and haste she squashed several of the little creatures and alas, when she finally sent a dizzy half dozen on their voyage the leaf capsized and the passengers were drowned. This effectually discouraged Sarah and she turned again to the prospect of wading.

The water was so cold that the soft green grass seemed more inviting and Sarah began to

walk along the brook's edge, wincing a little now and then as her foot struck a sharp stone. Then, without warning, she stepped into a hole and sharp, darting tongues of fire attacked her ankles.

"Yellow jackets! Wasps! Bees!" shrieked the unfortunate child, flinging her shoes into the brook and her stockings clear on the other side as she started to run. "Get away—leave me alone!"

She had stepped into a nest of yellow jackets and stirred up great wrath. Her feet and ankles suffered the most stings, though one furious insect lighted on her elbow and another on her wrist while a third punctured her cheek. Running madly and crying with pain, Sarah finally succeeded in distancing the yellow jackets, but her shoes and stockings, as far as she was concerned, were a total loss. Nothing, she was positive, would induce her to go back and get them.

She limped sadly to the orchard and climbed her favorite wide-branching apple tree, to take count of her injuries. Angry, white puffy swellings showed where each sting had exacted toll.

"There must be a million," said the suffering Sarah.

But it was cold comfort, counting the wounds,

and she longed for sympathy. Glancing through her leafy screen she saw Richard skirting the orchard fence on his way to the barn. She turned to scramble down and in the descent struck her elbow on the bark, the poor elbow already tender from a vicious sting. Sarah cried out in pain, let go hastily and tumbled to the ground.

Richard had heard her cry and he came running to pick her up.

"Good grief, you *are* a wreck!" he ejaculated when he saw her. "There, there, Sarah! You haven't broken any bones—I'll brush you off and you'll be as good as new. Don't cry like that—please don't!"

CHAPTER XI

ALL SERENE AGAIN

"I THINK," said Richard, judiciously, "I'll carry you up to the barn and wash you off; your mother might think you were permanently disfigured if she saw you now."

Sarah was truly a forlorn-looking object, but he tucked her under his arm and set off for the barn, trying in vain to soothe her as they went. Sarah wept continuously and only stopped when she was put down on the barn floor. She stopped then because someone was making more noise than she could possibly make.

"I don't want to hear another word," Mr. Hildreth was saying in a cold, loud voice. "Not another word. You left those grain bins open and the least you can do is to admit it like a man."

"I did not leave them open!" Warren's voice was as passionate and shaken as the other's was cold. "I tell you I did not! I haven't been in the barn this morning, except once to get the oil can. I wasn't near the bins."

Richard was pumping water into a basin and Sarah was glad he was not looking at her. She had forgotten to put the lids of the grain bins down! The door of the small washroom was jerked violently open and Warren strode in. Mr. Hildreth had evidently terminated the argument by leaving the barn.

"Hello, you look about as amiable as a thunder storm," Richard greeted his chum. "Got a clean handkerchief handy?"

Warren grimly extended a clean square.

"What's the matter with Sarah?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, she's had a hard morning—thought I'd wash off some of the worst of it before she scared everyone at the house into fits," explained Richard, beginning gently on Sarah's face, with the clean handkerchief dipped in water. "What was the row?"

Warren's face darkened. He bit his lip.

"Mr. Hildreth found the whole flock of hens having a Thanksgiving dinner out of the grain bins this morning," he said in a tone which he strived to make light and even. "He insists I left the lids up and I am just as sure I didn't. In a moment of madness I might leave one up,

but I never had all the bins open at the same time since I've worked here."

"If Mr. Hildreth had a grain of sense," pronounced Richard, looking dubiously at Sarah who still presented a sad appearance notwithstanding his ministrations, "he'd know better than to accuse you. Of course some of these children have been fooling around the bins."

Sarah jumped at this uncanny penetration. She wanted nothing in the world so much as to get out of that washroom, away from Richard's straightforward gaze.

She edged carefully toward the door—but there was to be no escape.

"Sarah, were you in the barn this morning?" asked Richard.

Her answer was a look that Doctor Hugh would have been able to instantly interpret—it meant that Sarah had retreated into one of her obstinate, sulky silences and had made up her mind not to be forced into speech.

Richard turned and shot the bolt across the door.

"Were you in the barn this morning?" he repeated. "Answer me—but I know you were; and you must have left the grain bins open."

Sarah remained silent. Richard took a step

toward the obdurate little figure, but Warren's voice halted him.

"Quit it, Rich," he said quietly. "Open that door. Run along, Sarah, and next time you climb an apple tree, have a pillow on the ground ready to catch you."

Sarah stepped over the sill, turned around, seemed about to speak and then went silently out of the barn. She heard Richard say something and Warren's reply:

"Oh, what difference does it make, if she did?"

Mrs. Willis knew what to do for the yellow jacket stings and she knew how to cure scratched hands and arms and soothe aching little heads. She knew, too, the signs of a hurt heart—when it was Sarah's. Shirley thought her sister was merely "cranky" when she pushed her out of the swing and Rosemary decided to let Sarah severely alone when that small girl hurled her music from the piano rack and began a violent performance of "chop sticks." But Mrs. Willis waited patiently.

It can not be denied that Sarah made the remainder of the day a veritable "blue Monday" for her family. Secure in the privileges accorded her as an invalid, she quarreled with

Shirley and Rosemary, drove Winnie to distraction with repeated requests for cookies and lemonade and answered Mrs. Hildreth snappishly when that good woman stopped in for a moment's chat and generally behaved, as Winnie put it "like all possessed."

And yet, when Rosemary announced at supper that Richard and Warren were going to walk to the "Center" to see a man at the creamery and that they would be back before dark and had said the girls might go with them, Sarah's refusal to go immediately convinced her sisters that she must be really ill.

They set off as soon as the meal was over, Rosemary and Shirley and the two boys, and Sarah curled herself, a disconsolate little heap, in the porch swing. And there her mother found her and in less than two minutes had the whole story, from the pathetic beginning. "The hen was awfully sick, Mother," down to the "queer feelings" Sarah had experienced when Richard, always so good-natured and kind, had turned into an entirely different person.

"And I'm afraid of Mr. Hildreth," wailed Sarah, the tears flowing again as she ended her recital. "He'll yell at me, if I tell him, the way he did at Warren."

"Why no," said Mrs. Willis, in the most matter-of-fact tone. "Why no, he won't, Sarah. Certainly not. And you're not one bit afraid of him. He'll be sitting out on the porch now, smoking his pipe and quite ready to listen to whatever you have to tell him. You don't want Mother to go with you, do you?"

"Of course not," said Sarah, almost as matter-of-factly. "I'll go now, before the boys get back, Mother."

And away she marched to the bungalow, confidently, if not cheerfully. She had meant to ask her mother whether it would be necessary to confess that she had been the one who left the bins open, but Mrs. Willis had so evidently taken for granted that Sarah meant to do this at once, that the question had never been asked. Well, if Mr. Hildreth wasn't going to yell at her and if she wasn't afraid of him—and her mother had said he wouldn't and she wasn't—there was no earthly reason why she should not admit that she had been careless.

It all happened exactly as Mrs. Willis had said. Mr. Hildreth was sitting on his porch, smoking comfortably and resting after a hard day. He was surprised to see Sarah, but he did not yell at her. Instead he listened silently

while she stammered out that she had been to blame for the hens feasting in the bins. She told him about the sick hen and she outlined her eventful day, culminating in the tumble from the apple tree and Richard's attempt to render first aid in the washroom.

"Well," Mr. Hildreth spoke for the first time, when she had finished. "Well, I'm glad you came to me and told me—though that's the natural thing to do. Own up when you're wrong—isn't it?"

"Is it?" asked Sarah doubtfully.

"Only square thing to do," the farmer assured her. "I'll tell Warren before I turn in to-night, then we'll be above board all around. You like animals, don't you?" he added suddenly.

"When I grow up," she announced, "I'm not going to do a thing but take care of animals. I'm going to have a farm, like yours, Mr. Hildreth, and I'm going to have seven automobiles with men to drive 'em. They'll go through all the cities and take the poor sick horses and dogs and cats and—and birds and things and bring 'em back to my farm. Then I'll doctor them up and cure them."

"So you think you'll be a doctor, hey?" said the farmer lazily.

"An animal doctor," Sarah affirmed. "I won't take care of sick folks, 'cause they're cross; Shirley is going to be that kind of a doctor maybe. Animals are never cross, no matter how sick they are. Did you know that, Mr. Hildreth?"

"Come to think of it, I do," Mr. Hildreth admitted, enjoying the conversation immensely. "But where'll you get money to run this farm, Sarah? Don't you think you ought to raise some crops?"

Sarah pondered.

"Rich and Warren can do that," she decided easily. "They'll be through agricultural college by then and perhaps they'll like to run my farm. But Warren will have to buy a tractor, because I won't let my horses plow. None of the animals are going to work, when I take care of them."

Mr. Hildreth glanced at her queerly.

"You're just like the rest," he said grimly. "You think of work as something to side-step, don't you? Let me tell you, Sarah, that unless you give these animal friends of yours something to do and train them to do it regularly, you will have to spend all your days dosing them."

"You mean they'll be sick?" asked Sarah, worried at once.

"Of course they'll be sick," declared Mr. Hil-

dreth. "Animals and people need work to keep them well. Ask your brother."

"Then I'll let my animals work just enough," said Sarah thoughtfully. "Not too much, but just enough. And maybe I'll let Warren plow with the horses."

"I would, if I were you," agreed Mr. Hildreth. "You work pretty hard yourself, don't you, Sarah?"

Sarah stared at him suspiciously. Apparently he was serious.

"Of course," continued Mr. Hildreth, "you call it play. But when I see you flying over this farm and trying to be in two places at once and cram half a hundred experiences into one short day, I think you work as hard as I do. Maybe harder. Don't you ever get tired, Sarah?"

"When I go to bed," responded that active person. "But I'm not tired when I first go," she added hastily. "Mother or Hugh or Winnie are always making me go to bed before I'm sleepy. I want to study the insects on the lawn, but how can I when I have to go to bed?"

"You're not the first person who has wanted to turn night into day," said Mr. Hildreth calmly. "It's lucky for some of us that you're

not successful. If we had to keep an eye on you all night, Sarah, as well as during the waking hours, think how little else we'd get done."

Sarah had a shrewd suspicion that he was laughing at her. She turned to go.

"Wait a minute—wouldn't you like a pet?" said the farmer quickly.

"Oh, yes!" replied Sarah.

"I was thinking you might like a baby pig," Mr. Hildreth informed her. "There's one in the last litter that isn't getting a fair chance. He's a runt and crowded out. If you want to take him and bring him up on a bottle, you can have him for your own."

"I'll take him," said Sarah quickly. "I can learn how to feed him, can't I? And he can sleep with me—or at least in my room—I knew a girl who had a little puppy and he slept in her doll's bed. Thank you ever so much, Mr. Hildreth."

So it was arranged that Sarah was to have her pig in the morning and she and Mr. Hildreth parted excellent friends.

She did not go back to the house but, instead, started off down the road over which, she knew, Warren and Richard, Rosemary and Shirley, must come. She had walked perhaps half a mile, when she saw them.

Sarah became unaccountably shy. She walked more and more slowly and, reaching Rosemary, who was ahead, she found she had nothing to say.

"Hello, dear," Rosemary greeted her, wondering why Sarah had changed her mind and come to meet them. "Do you feel better?"

"Come back and walk with me, Sarah," said Warren pleasantly, for he had determined to put Sarah at her ease about the grain bins.

"A fuss like that is nothing to worry about," he had told Richard, "and I don't like to see a kid unhappy over such trifles."

Sarah waited till the other three were a little ahead and then she slipped a confiding hand into Warren's.

"I told Mr. Hildreth," she whispered, "and he wasn't cross one bit; and I'm going to have a baby pig for my own and bring it up on a bottle."

Warren's face was as bright as the one she lifted to his.

"Why Sarah Willis!" he said joyfully. "Why Sarah! You went to Mr. Hildreth about those silly grain bins? You needn't have done that—I meant to tell you not to worry. But, of course, I'm glad you did tell him."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Shirley, looking back. "Did Sarah tell Mr. Hildreth something?"

Richard's glance rested sharply on Sarah. He smiled, grasping what had happened with his usual quickness.

"You're a brick, Sarah!" he complimented her. "A brick—that's what you are."

But Sarah was eager to tell about her pig and Warren wished to change the topic so no more was said then. Instead Richard addressed himself to the three Willis girls collectively.

"I think you've about explored Rainbow Hill," he announced, "at least Sarah has. She's exhausted its possibilities, if I'm a fair judge. I think you need some new interests."

"Yes," agreed Shirley with perfect gravity and not the slightest idea of his meaning, "yes we do, Richard."

They all laughed, but Richard was not to be side-tracked.

"There's the Gay family," he said. "You don't know them, but some of the children must be about your own age."

Rosemary thought "Gay" a pretty name and said so while Sarah reproved her. "Gay isn't a

name, silly; it means they always have a good time. Doesn't it, Richard?"

"Well no, not in this case," replied Richard, "but I'm going over there to-morrow morning and, if you like, you may come along and get acquainted."

CHAPTER XII

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

THE entire household was startled to be awakened at three o'clock the next morning by the mad ringing of an alarm clock. Shirley wept, Mrs. Willis and Rosemary were sure it was the telephone and Winnie scolded vigorously and, still scolding, traced the noise to Sarah's bed.

Sure enough, the clock was there and Sarah admitted that she had set it.

"I wanted to be sure and get up early," she explained. "I have to get my pig and go and see the Gay family."

But she further conceded that she had not meant to rise at the witching hour of three A. M. Her intention had been to set the alarm for half-past five and her mistake was due to the fact that she had not set an alarm clock before.

"And never will again," commented Winnie, bearing the offending clock away with her for safe-keeping. "Not if I have anything to say, will you ever touch an alarm clock."

Breakfast was half an hour later than usual, in consequence of this performance, and Sarah was in a fever of impatience to reach the pig pens. When finally excused from the table, she shot through the door and was back before her mother and sisters had left the dining-room.

Loud sounds of altercation in the kitchen proclaimed her return.

"You can't bring that in here—go away, Sarah Willis!" came Winnie's voice. "Where did you get that dirty beast?"

"He's mine—he's a pig," countered Sarah, who always assumed that Winnie was intensely ignorant in matters of natural history. "Mr. Hildreth gave him to me."

There was the noise of a scuffle, the slam of a door and then Sarah's wail:

"Oh, you've hurt him! And he's sick—you're the most cruel woman I ever knew and I'll tell Mother so!"

Mrs. Willis opened the swinging door into the kitchen and Rosemary and Shirley pressed close behind her. Sarah stood on the back porch, a young pig in her arms, and Winnie occupied the center of the kitchen floor.

"We don't keep our pigs in the parlor—not in this house," said Winnie firmly. "Nor yet in the kitchen—as long as I'm in it."

Rosemary thought then, as she had often thought before, how easily her mother settled differences and with how few words. It took scarcely five minutes for Mrs. Willis to examine the pig and praise his possibilities to Sarah; to suggest a comfortable box in the woodshed as his logical home—where he might have fresh air in abundance and yet be close to Sarah if he needed her attention; and to enlist the sympathies of Winnie—whose bark was always loud and whose bite had never materialized yet—to the extent that she provided a piece of soft flannel to line the box and warm milk to comfort the interior of the little pig.

His pigship was a runt, as Mr. Hildreth had said, and deprived of his fair share of nourishment was bony and far from prepossessing. Rosemary had no desire to touch him, but Shirley was fascinated and she and Sarah put him to bed in the box and covered him up with all the care and devotion they had hitherto showered on dolls. As Richard observed, when he came to tell them he was starting for the Gay farm, even a pig could be killed by kindness.

"Mother said she'd get me a bottle for him," babbled Sarah as she emerged clean and damp from Winnie's polishing and joined Richard on

the step. "Hugh is going to take her to Bennington this morning and she'll buy it then. And I can bring him up by hand and teach him tricks. His name is—what is a good name for him, Richard?"

"Napoleon Bonaparte," supplied Richard with mischievous promptness. "You can call him 'Bony' for short, you know."

The practicality of this suggestion charmed Sarah beyond words, and the pig was immediately christened. "Bony" he became in that hour and "Bony" he remained, with the use of his full name on state occasions, long after he was as plump as any of his more fortunate brothers and sisters.

"Where do the Gays live?" asked Rosemary, when she and Shirley had joined the two sponsors and they were all walking over the field that led to the back road.

"Their land joins Rainbow Hill," returned Richard, "and if I had my way, we'd be better neighbors. The Gays are hard up and proud and the Hildreths are busy and like to keep to themselves. I don't know now whether Louisa and Alec will be glad to see me bringing three strangers to meet 'em, but my honest opinion is they need someone to say 'Hello' and be friendly without prying."

Rosemary looked at him speculatively.

"Perhaps Mother had better go to see Mrs. Gay first," she suggested, with a little touch of her mother's own generalship.

"There isn't any Mrs. Gay," said Richard soberly. "They're orphans—all six of 'em. And Warren and I have it figured out that grown people frighten them—Louisa and Alec shut up like clams when they meet anyone in town. They won't think you and Sarah and Shirley mean to boss their affairs. Maybe they'll be friends with you."

The three girls drew closer to Richard as they approached a tumbled-down fence. Six year old Shirley expressed, in a measure, their feelings when she stopped Richard as he attempted to lift her over, with the observation that she had never seen an orphan.

"An orphan hasn't any mother or father, you know, Shirley," said Richard, smiling. "You'll find Kitty Gay a little girl very much like yourself. Show her how lovely a little girl named Shirley Willis can be."

"We'll know eight orphans then, in a minute," declared Sarah, her statistical mind functioning even as she helped to replace the fence bars. "The Gays are six and you and Warren are

two; so you did see an orphan before, Shirley."

"For mercy's sake, forget the orphan part of it," begged poor Richard. "Don't say 'orphan' once—I didn't bring you up here to look at the Gays. They're no side show."

Rosemary laughed, then sobered instantly as a turn in the lane brought them face to face with a tow-headed lad, carrying two pails of water. He was about the age of Jack Welles, she decided, but infinitely thinner and lacking Jack's solid build.

" 'Lo, Dick!" he said cordially. "Want me?"

Richard introduced the three girls with more ease than Rosemary had expected. Alec Gay was undeniably shy, but he asked them to come to the house and meet his sister, Louisa. Richard took one pail and Alec the other, and they went on.

"Louisa!" shouted Alec as they came in sight of a weather-beaten house set in a fenced enclosure of rank grass where a cow grazed peacefully.

A girl appeared in the doorway, a tow-headed girl with blue eyes like her brother's, and thin shoulders, like his, too. She wore a faded blue dress and a black apron and looked clean and neat.

This was Louisa Gay and noting that she glanced uncertainly into the doorway, after Richard had introduced them, Rosemary tactfully suggested that they sit on the stoop.

"We can't stay long and it is too nice to go indoors," she said sincerely.

"The house doesn't look very nice this morning," apologized Louisa, "to tell the truth, everything is in a mess; but if we stay out here, the children will come hunting for me and they're a mess, too. There isn't much choice, either way."

She sat down beside Rosemary who kept fast hold of Shirley lest she start an exploring tour of her own.

"Where's the Kitty girl?" asked Shirley frankly.

As she spoke a stream of children poured out of the house—or it seemed like a stream, though when they were counted they were but four. Each and every one of them had light hair and blue eyes like Alec and Louisa, all were tanned and freckled and all were shouting madly. The youngest was a baby, the oldest a year or so older than Sarah. Two were boys and two girls.

"Jim, Ken, Kitty and June," said Alec glibly.

"For goodness' sake, do keep still," he admonished the children. "Can't you see we have company?"

Richard, who evidently felt at home, had gone on into the kitchen with the pail of water and came out in time to hear Alec's remark.

"We're not company," he said quickly. "We're neighbors."

Shirley, after staring a few seconds at Kitty, began to talk to her as though she were an old friend. Sarah went over to look at the cow and Jim and Ken followed her. The baby, June, climbed into Rosemary's lap and sat quietly there.

"She never goes to strangers," marveled Louisa, leaning over to straighten out the crumpled little skirts. "Look Alec, she likes her."

Alec was looking and so was Richard. Rosemary made a pretty picture there in the sunlight, her lovely vivid face turned to Louisa, her arms about the tousled little figure on her knees.

"It's so nice to have a girl of my own age to talk to," Louisa said appreciatively. "I never have time to go down to town any more and I don't see the girls I used to know."

"But in the winter?" suggested Rosemary. "You go to school, winters, don't you?"

Louisa's lips tightened.

"I didn't last winter and I don't intend to this," she announced with curious defiance. "There's no one to take care of the children except Alec and me. We tried taking turns staying home, but neither one of us could learn much that way so we gave it up."

Richard had come over, so he said, to borrow a file and presently he declared he must get back to work. June was handed back to Louisa, Sarah summoned from her lecture on pigs—to which the boys were giving rapt attention, and Shirley, with difficulty, detached from Kitty and a dilapidated rope swing.

"You'll come over and see us, won't you?" said Rosemary eagerly.

"No," interposed Alec, standing straight and tall beside his sister.

The monosyllable sounded ungracious but Rosemary, looking at Alec, saw that he did not mean to be discourteous. He looked a little unhappy, a little shy, a bit afraid, even. And Louisa's blue eyes were wistful.

"Then we'll come see you," promised Rosemary gravely.

"I'm glad you said that," approved Richard, leading the way down the road. "Alec never goes anywhere that he doesn't have to and Louisa is getting to be just like him. First thing those kids know, they'll be queer."

"Am I queer?" asked Sarah in sudden alarm.

"Not yet, but you want to be mighty careful," Richard warned her. "Lots of people get queer, thinking too much about pigs, I've heard."

"I won't talk about any pig but my darling Bony," declared Sarah. "I won't get queer talking about him."

CHAPTER XIII

THE GAY FAMILY

AS Richard had foreseen, the Willis girls formed the habit of wandering over to the Gay farm nearly every day. Rosemary liked Louisa and the taciturn Alec, and the younger children were companionable in age and tastes for Sarah and Shirley.

It was Warren who explained something of the conditions under which the Gay children worked and lived, one evening when the girls were in bed and Winnie was busy setting bread in the kitchen. Warren treasured these rare half hours on the porch with Mrs. Willis and he had once declared to Richard that ten minutes' uninterrupted conversation with "Rosemary's mother" could make him forget the hardest and longest day.

"The way I figure it out," said Warren, his lean, brown face showing earnest lines even in the shaded light from the porch lamp, "the way I figure it, Mrs. Willis, the Gays will help Rose-

mary and Sarah and Shirley and they will certainly help them. Alec is fifteen and Louisa is just Rosemary's age—and yet they have the burden of supporting and bringing up four younger children."

"And my girls have such a happy, sheltered life," struck in Mrs. Willis. "Yes, Warren, I can see what you mean; it won't hurt them to learn of the existence of poverty and hard work. But what happened to the parents of these children?"

"They died a couple of years ago—within three months of each other, I believe," said Warren. "All they left was these few acres—sixty, I think Alec told me. There's a mortgage and most of the stock has been sold off—Alec does wonders for his age, but he can't get the work done alone. I helped him some last year and I'd help him more, but he is too proud to take much."

"But they can't go on like this," Mrs. Willis protested. "It is unthinkable—to allow six children to struggle alone for a living on a barren little farm. Doesn't anyone take an interest in them—the Hildreths or any of the people who live near and who knew their father and mother?"

Warren settled deeper into his comfortable chair.

"If the house burned down, I suppose they'd be taken in by some of the neighbors," he said a trifle bitterly. "Or if they all came down with the plague, someone might drop in to offer advice. But either of these calamities would have to happen in winter at that, to attract attention; the farmers of this community can't be disturbed in summer when they're up to their elbows in work."

"You don't mean that, Warren," the little lady opposite him smiled confidently.

"I mean at least half of it," asserted Warren doggedly. "Of course when Mr. and Mrs. Gay died, everyone pitched in and helped the children; I suppose they did, though I wasn't here to see. But I do know that now when they need advice and practical help, they're apparently forgotten. Their attendance at school last winter was a farce and yet the authorities let an investigation slide; Mr. Hildreth promises vaguely to 'look after them' in the fall—and there they are, six fine American children left to bring themselves up."

"Someone must be responsible," said Mrs. Willis firmly. "I'll speak to Hugh—he will know what to do."

Warren shook his head.

"I wouldn't—that is not yet," he declared. "It is rather difficult to explain and—well, I suppose I haven't been quite fair in my statements, either. Alec and Louisa do not invite friendship—they are extremely proud and shy and so reserved as to be almost repellant to strangers. I think every allowance should be made, under the circumstances, for them, but the neighbors who tried to do for them at first were miffed, I suppose, and take the attitude that if they want to keep to themselves, they may.

"Alec is close-mouthed, too, and I fancy he has resented attempts to publicly discuss their financial affairs. There is a mortgage on the farm, of course—what would a farm be without a mortgage?" Warren digressed for a moment but was instantly serious—"and I suppose the interest keeps Alec awake nights figuring. Both he and Louisa have given up going anywhere—they send one of the children to the Center for the few things they have to buy. It's simmered right down to this—they're avoiding everyone and if they don't look out they'll be as queer as—as the dickens!"

"Like some of those mountaineers I saw when

Hugh took me over the back road to that little settlement at the foot of the hills," said Mrs. Willis. "The women peep out of the windows furtively and the children run if they see a stranger—all because they have lost the habit of meeting folk."

"That's it," agreed Warren eagerly. "That's what I mean. And I think it is a shame, for the Gays are nice kids—clean and honest and wholesome. You know I would never have taken the girls over there if there was the slightest possibility of the Gays setting them a bad example in any way. I have a cousin who is a teacher and she is always preaching that children pick up the bad traits they see in others quicker than they do the good ones."

"I'm not so sure of that," smiled Mrs. Willis. "But I am glad you are so thoughtful, Warren. They are very precious to me—my three daughters."

"If I had three sisters like them—" Warren's voice faltered.

He began again, hurriedly.

"What the Gays need," he said earnestly, "is human contacts—I think that's the phrase I want. They need to know normal, happy children their own age. It isn't the poverty that

will hurt them—Rich and I have been as poor as church mice and are still; but we have battled our way through school and mixed with fellows and met people. In some ways Louisa and Alec are ten years beyond their time—they run the farm and train and punish those four youngsters and figure out expenses like a couple of old stagers. Give 'em one more year and they'll forget how to laugh and be hopelessly mixed on the true values."

"I think I know what you are trying to bring about," observed Mrs. Willis sagely. "You think they'll trust the girls and make friends with them and, later, an older person will be able to gain their confidence. An older head will be needed soon, if that farm is the only source of income. Well, Warren, I believe you are right and it will work out nicely in the end. I'm glad to have the girls see something of lives that are different from theirs and I know they will all three learn a great deal that will be helpful to them. I did plan to go over and see the Gays but now I'll wait, for a time at least."

"She's a wonder!" said Warren to himself, walking back to the bungalow a few minutes later. "She can see just what is in a fellow's mind and sort it out for him. Funny how Rich

and I puzzled over what made those three girls so different from any girls we ever knew—they do just as many crazy things and Winnie says they have tempers and wills of their own, but they have something that sets them apart—Rich said it was ideals and I called it fine standards and, in a measure, I suppose we're both right. But just two words will explain everything—their mother!"

It must be confessed that Bony, the pig, claimed a large share of Sarah's time and attention. She let Rosemary and Shirley go over to see the Gays very often without her. There were the pig's meals to be served, his toilet to be made and his manners and training carefully considered.

"My conscience, Sarah Willis, you're not going to wash that pig, are you?" demanded Winnie the first morning Sarah made known her ideas on the question of cleanliness in connection with Bony.

"I certainly am," announced Sarah with appalling firmness. "Hugh says you can't be well, 'less you are clean. I don't suppose I can wash Bony in the bathtub?"

"Now Sarah, if I didn't love you, you would have driven me crazy years ago," said Winnie,

who was a famous general when she minded to be. "You know washing a pig in the bathtub is out of the question. I wouldn't wash him in the laundry tubs, either; we have to be nice to Mrs. Pritchard for if she deserts us like as not there'll be no more clean clothes this summer; you can't pick and choose your washwoman in the country."

"Where'll I wash him then?" asked Sarah.

"Take him out to the barns—there must be tubs there," directed Winnie. "I'll give you a piece of soap and an old towel. Don't bring the towel back, either."

"I'll hang it on a bush to dry," promised Sarah amiably. "But I have to have some hot water, Winnie; Bony is delicate and I can't give him a cold bath."

"Then he'll have to wait till to-morrow for his bath," said the wily Winnie. "The tea kettle is empty and I can't be lighting the stove to heat water just now."

"Well, I'll try the cold water," Sarah decided reluctantly, "but if Bony catches cold, you'll be sorry—that's all."

The pig under one arm and the towel and soap under the other, Sarah made for the barn and reached the big tub where the horses were watered, when Warren saw her.

"What are you going to do with that pig, Sarah?" he asked suspiciously.

"Wash him," said Sarah, beginning to weary of being questioned.

"Not in that horse tub," declared Warren. "I've just filled it for the team. That's a drinking trough, not a bathtub."

Brief experience had already taught Sarah, as it had Rosemary and Shirley, that while Richard might be cajoled or persuaded, Warren was firmness itself. If he said that pigs could not be washed in the watering tub, that settled the matter.

"The brook is the best place to wash a pig, anyway, Sarah," suggested Warren helpfully. "You take this stiff brush and put Bony in the middle of the brook and scrub his back and he'll be the happiest little pig you ever saw. But if that is a good dress you have on, take my advice and stay away from water," he added.

"I won't get wet," said Sarah indifferently. "Well, I guess I'll have to wash Bony in the brook. I never saw such a fussy bunch of people."

She scrubbed the pig thoroughly, soaking herself to the skin in the process, and dried him neatly with the towel. Then she took him back

to his box, fed him a nursing bottle of warm milk—he had readily learned to take the bottle—covered him up and hung the soiled wet towel on the rose bush by the front door. Leaving the scrubbing brush in the porch swing and the jellied remains of the soap on a gingham pillow, Sarah retired to put on a dry frock, feeling that she had accomplished one task successfully.

"That pig," said Winnie, when she came upon the soapy trail of his bath, "that pig will drive us crazy yet. You mark my words!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE GAY FINANCES

SARAH continued to bathe her pig every day. In fact she omitted no slightest detail that could contribute to his health and comfort; and the amount of care and affection she lavished on "that porker," as Mr. Hildreth referred to Bony, would have amazed anyone unacquainted with Sarah's trait of exceeding thoroughness. Whatever she found to do—providing it was to her liking—this small girl did with all her might.

But naturally the most interesting of pigs could not occupy all her time. Bony was young and he craved sleep. It was during his rest periods that Sarah would consent to accompany her sisters to the Gay farm. Once there, she was like the boy who, led protestingly to the party, had to be dragged home.

"Oh, dear, I'm sorry you have to find the house in such a mess," Louisa Gay apologized one morning, across the table filled with dirty

dishes and pots and pans piled high in confusion. "I was helping Alec in the field all day yesterday and just let the dishes pile up. This morning I meant to wash everything in sight—I was too tired to touch a plate last night."

"We'll help," said Rosemary sympathetically.

She knew that the four younger Gays were forbidden to light a fire in Louisa's absence—she and Alec were most strict about this—and that, for this reason, they could not heat water and wash the dishes for their sister.

"We'll help," repeated Rosemary cheerfully. "I have washed tons of dishes in cooking class; and Sarah will dry them for us."

"I will, if Kitty will," qualified Sarah, hastily, having no mind to be tied down to domestic duties while someone else played.

"Kitty is in bed," said Louisa severely. "I told her to make the beds yesterday and she never touched one. She said she forgot. So now she has to stay in bed till dinner time to make her remember."

"I'm going to get up now, Louisa!" shrilled the wrathful voice of Kitty from the upstairs hall.

"You go back to bed and stay there, till I tell you you can get up," directed Louisa. "Unless

you want to be locked in your room and miss your dinner."

Kitty retreated—they heard the door of her room slam—and Louisa went on with her plate scraping.

"There's the baby!" Louisa started nervously. "Kenneth must have stopped rocking her."

At that moment Kenneth appeared in the kitchen doorway, looking distinctly cross.

"I don't see why I always have to rock the baby!" he grumbled. "Alec wants me to stake Dora down by the brook and when am I going to get any time to help him if I have to keep June quiet?"

"Let me rock her," said Shirley. "I can rock just as nice—can't I, Rosemary?"

"Well, I think you could," admitted Rosemary, smiling. "You must touch the cradle very gently, you know, Shirley—don't rock June as though she were in a boat at sea."

She went in to the darkened room off the kitchen with Shirley and showed her how to sway the old-fashioned cradle with a soothing motion. When she came back to Louisa, Kenneth had disappeared and Sarah with him.

"I declare, sometimes I get so discouraged, I don't know what to do," confided Louisa, filling

the heavy tea kettle at the sink and lifting it to the stove. "We do everything the wrong way and yet I don't see where we can take time to do them any better.

"For instance, there's June. I know she shouldn't be rocked to sleep—but the one day I tried to break her of the habit and make her go to sleep quietly by herself, I didn't get a thing done. The other children got into mischief, Alec was hurt trying to pitch hay and manage the team without help and, after all, June didn't learn a thing. She acted worse the next day, so I had to give it up and go back to the cradle rocking."

"I suppose it is hard because she is used to the cradle now," said Rosemary, busily clearing a place on the table for the clean dishes.

"Yes, that's the reason," agreed Louisa. "And we spend a lot of time staking Dora around in different places—she was in the front yard that day you came over with Richard. She was there because the front yard has the one decent piece of fencing left on the farm. She would give more milk if we could let her go free in the pasture—but Kenneth has to stake her with a staple and rope because the fences are so poor—where there are any—that the only way to keep her home is to tie her."

"You're tired," said Rosemary quickly. "You worked too hard yesterday, Louisa. I wish you'd go off somewhere—find a nice, cool place —and rest; I'll do these dishes."

Louisa did look tired. More than that, she looked discouraged. She had not taken pains to brush her hair as carefully as usual and it was "slicked back" in the tightest possible knot. Her dress was perfectly clean, but so faded and mended that it would have taken a merry-hearted girl to have been quite happy in it. Louisa was far from merry-hearted.

"But the potatoes will bring in some money, won't they?" urged Rosemary, who now knew a great deal about the Gay finances.

"They will, if they're not all sunburned, before Alec gets them into the barn," responded Louisa gloomily, pouring hot water over a pan of dishes. "Last year the yield was poor, too. Ken and Jim try to help, but neither Alec nor I can bear to keep such little boys working in the hot sun all day long. It isn't right."

Louisa was not given to complaint and Rosemary guessed something of the pressure the slender shoulders must be enduring.

"I wish I had a million dollars!" burst out Rosemary, putting her arm about Louisa. "I'd give it all to you!"

To her distress, Louisa began to cry. She was standing near the kitchen table and she just put her head down on her arms and "let go" as Rosemary later told her brother. Shirley, who had ventured to leave the cradle, after several cautious tests to determine the depth of June's slumbers, peered in aghast. Rosemary motioned to her to go on and Shirley dashed out into the sunshine, glad to escape.

"You're so sweet to me!" choked Louisa, raising her tear-stained face. "And you're so pretty—I never saw a girl as pretty as you are. I wish I could look the way you do and have the clothes you do!"

So the faded dress had had something to do with it, after all.

Rosemary had always taken her pretty summer frocks for granted. Now she looked from her own blue and white gingham to Louisa's old dress and remembered the freshly-ironed linens and ginghams hanging in her closet. Not many, perhaps, but dainty and pretty, every one, and neither old-fashioned nor faded.

"I wish you'd let me give you a couple of mine," said Rosemary impulsively. "We're almost the same size and you would look so nice in blue, Louisa. I wouldn't tell a single soul."

Louisa dried her eyes and reached for the dish mop.

"I'm ashamed of myself," she declared briskly. "I don't know what made me cry like that—Alec and the boys would think I had lost my mind. No, I couldn't take a dress from you, Rosemary—I don't really need it, anyway. Thank you, just the same. We need so many things that I vow there is no place to begin to replenish; a dress would be a drop in the bucket."

They both laughed a little at Louisa's mixed metaphor and the laughter cleared away the last trace of the tears. As they washed and dried the mountains of dishes, Louisa explained that what was really troubling her, was the interest.

"The interest on the mortgage, you know," she said earnestly. "It is due the first of September. Mr. Greenleaf holds the mortgage and Alec is desperately afraid he will foreclose."

Rosemary's experience with mortgages dated from that minute, but she sensed the importance of the interest.

"Perhaps the potatoes—" she suggested hopefully, having great faith in Alec's main crop.

"We owe for the seed and the fertilizer," answered Louisa. "And last year's taxes are

not paid; and if we do manage to scrape together enough to pay the interest, I don't see what we're going to live on the rest of the year."

Rosemary had to admit that the outlook was discouraging. She scoured a paring knife thoughtfully and polished it off before she ventured a new suggestion.

"Why doesn't Alec go to this Mr. Greenleaf, and tell him that he is having a hard time?" Rosemary proposed. "Ask him to wait a little longer for his money. Hugh waits when people can not pay him; I heard Winnie say that he never collects a bill, but waits for the money."

Louisa looked graver than ever.

"The one thing we must never do, and you must never, never tell," she said impressively, "is to go to Mr. Greenleaf. Just as soon as it is known in town that we are having a hard time to get along, do you know what will happen? They'll take the farm away from us and send us to the poor farm—probably bind Alec and me out and separate the family for good and all. My father and mother would rather have us dead than paupers."

"Could anyone take the farm away from you and do that?" asked Rosemary, much shocked.

"Of course—it's often done," said Louisa, her

light blue eyes gazing intensely at her friend. "They'd take us to the poor farm in a minute, if they knew we couldn't hold the farm."

"Perhaps it is pleasant at the poor farm," Rosemary was trying to find the cloud's silver lining. "You might like it there; did you ever see it?"

"No, and I never want to," retorted Louisa with finality.

Then Rosemary asked what it was to be "bound out" and Louisa told her that children old enough to work were bound out to families who agreed to give them their board and clothes and send them to school in return for their services.

"It would mean that until we are eighteen we'd never have a cent to call our own," declared Louisa. "We couldn't do a thing for the younger children and, worst of all, we should be separated."

It was a very sober Rosemary who helped with the remainder of the work that morning. She spread dish towels to bleach, she swept the porch, made the beds—visiting for a brief moment with the unrepentant Kitty who clamored to be allowed to get up and finally was released a half hour ahead of time on her promise to pick

the "greens" for dinner—and, at Louisa's request, showed her how a simple soup was made in cooking class at the Eastshore school. But she was unusually silent while she did all this.

Walking home across the fields at noon—they steadfastly refused to burden the harassed family with three extra mouths to feed—Sarah noticed her sister's abstraction.

"What's the matter, Rosemary?" she asked curiously and Shirley echoed the question.

"Oh—I'm thinking," said Rosemary.

CHAPTER XV

THE POOR FARM

ROSEMARY thought a great deal about the Gays in the days that followed. Louisa had asked her to promise that she would tell no one the precarious state of their finances—"no one can help and I won't be discussed like the 'cases' they bring up at the sewing circle," said Louisa passionately.

"They'd be 'running up' clothes for June and Kitty," she said another time, "and fitting us out to go to the poor farm looking respectable. I'd rather stay here and look any old way."

Sarah was extremely observant for her years and she surprised Rosemary and Louisa with a shrewd comment or two, until the latter deemed it expedient to take her into the inner circle of confidence. Sarah could be loyal and she could be silent. From that day she and Rosemary were leagued with Louisa and Alec to circumvent the town authorities.

Not that authority, in any guise, was ever

manifested. At least it had not been so far. Rosemary, on the beautiful moonlight nights when "Old Fiddlestrings" wandered again up and down the road, playing the "Serenade" with his soul in his fingers, found it hard to believe that there could be such ugly things in the world as poverty and fear. She was sure that Louisa and Alec must be mistaken—or else the money would come from somewhere—it must. There could not be such music and such moonlight and such heavenly scented breezes on an earth that was anything but wholly lovely, wholly kind.

"My dear child, you must go to bed," Mrs. Willis remonstrated on the third night when she came in to find Rosemary's room flooded with moonlight and Rosemary herself kneeling at the window. "You can hear the music just as well in bed and I don't like to have you lose so much sleep."

And then she brought a light comfortable from the bed and, wrapped in that, knelt with Rosemary at the window till the player and his violin walked wearily away out of sight. After all, what was the loss of a little sleep as compared with such playing?

"Heard Old Fiddlestrings again last night," said Mr. Hildreth, drawing up before the

kitchen door the next morning while Richard carried in the piece of ice they had brought from the creamery for Winnie. "I declare it's a mercy we don't have full moon more than once a month; no one would get a fair night's sleep. Does he bother you?"

"*Bother* us?" echoed Rosemary in astonishment. "Bother us? Why, it is the loveliest playing we have ever heard!"

Richard judged this an excellent time to ask a question.

"How would you like to go over to the poor farm?" he suggested, pulling Shirley back from the dusty wheel and taking a firm grip on Sarah with the other hand to prevent her from crawling under the horse—for what reason she alone knew.

"The poor farm?" Rosemary's mind immediately leaped to the Gays.

"Oh, Richard, do let's go!" she cried, her enthusiasm kindling. "I've always wanted to see the poor farm."

"Well, your brother goes there often enough," said Mr. Hildreth drily. "It's thanks to him that the new Board of Freeholders put in decent plumbing all through the place."

Richard climbed back into his seat and took the reins.

"Well, be ready in about fifteen minutes," he directed. "It's thanks to Mr. Hildreth that the poor-farm folks are going to get some early tomatoes."

"I've a good mind to cuff you," said the exasperated Mr. Hildreth who had never been known to raise his hand against anyone. (Warren had once remarked that when he raised his voice he needed no further reinforcements.) "It's a pity when we have the first tomatoes and more than we can use, not to send those poor creatures a few."

The "few" tomatoes proved to be six peach baskets full and they made a crimson splash in the back of the light spring wagon Warren presently drove around harnessed to the useful Solomon.

"Mother says do you want to take us all?" cried Shirley, balancing herself on the lowest step and eyeing Richard anxiously. "I hope you want all of us, Richard, because no one wants to stay home."

Her mother, coming out in time to hear this speech, laughed.

"Have you room for three, Richard?" she

asked. "The girls have had a great many rides lately and I'm sure one or two will stay home without grumbling, if necessary."

"Room for everybody," Richard assured her. "Don't you want to go, Mrs. Willis? I'll tip the girls over with the tomatoes and you may have the whole front seat, if you'll come."

"Thank you no," she answered him smiling. "Winnie and I have a busy day ahead of us. You know the doctor and Jack Welles are coming up next week to stay two weeks and Winnie and I want to have as much done ahead as we can. Have a good time and bring me home some wild flowers if you pass any growing along the road."

It was a warm morning, but no one minds that in July. Besides, as Sarah pointed out, there was now and then a breeze. Sarah and Shirley were seated in the middle of the single long seat with Richard at one end and Rosemary the other.

As usual Sarah and Shirley both wanted to drive and, also as usual, Richard settled the argument diplomatically by allowing each to hold the reins in turn, stipulating fixed distances for each, using the trees which could be seen ahead as boundary marks.

Rosemary was less interested in the driving than in their destination. She plied Richard with questions about the poor farm. Who lived there? How many people? How poor did one have to be before he was compelled to live on the poor farm? Did one, once sent there, ever save enough money to go somewhere else? Were there any children and what did they do?

"Good grief!" ejaculated the harassed Richard, at last rebelling. "I never lived on a poor farm, Rosemary. I don't know a great deal more about it than you do."

"Is it a nice place?" persisted Rosemary.

"Depends on what you call nice," answered Richard. "It is a large farm and the house looks comfortable. I'll tell you one thing—if I had to be a county charge, I'd rather be sent to a country poor farm than to a city almshouse; in the country you at least have something green to look at."

"Would you like to live at this poor farm?" said Rosemary.

Louisa and Alec, Kitty, Ken, Jim and June—they were in her mind. She would, perhaps, have some comforting news to take them about the poor farm. She was totally unprepared for the violence of Richard's reply.

"Like to live at the poor farm?" thundered he. "Not if it was the most magnificent place on earth! Do you think for one moment that I'd have charity handed out to me? I'd rather wash dishes for a living—what do you take me for, anyway?"

Three pairs of astonished eyes stared at him. Then Rosemary laughed and, after a moment, Richard laughed with her.

"Guess I got too eloquent," he admitted a little shamefacedly. "But honestly, Rosemary, I pity those poor souls who have to live at the poor farm, more than I pity any other people of whom I've ever heard. There is nothing worse, to my mind, than to be deprived of your independence and ability to work."

"How do you come to live in the poor house?" inquired Rosemary. "Sit still, Sarah; no, it isn't your turn to drive yet."

"Oh, sometimes you're old and haven't saved any money," said Richard absently. "Sometimes you're old and sick and have to stop earning. Lots of people lose those who would have supported them—say their children. And now and then parents die and leave a family of kids who must be brought up as wards of charity."

Rosemary hardly noticed when he took the

reins from Shirley and turned Solomon into a beautiful tree-lined road in perfect condition. She was thinking that "wards of charity" did not sound half as happy as when one said "the Gay children."

"Here we are!" announced Richard, stopping before a handsome red brick building with a great white front porch and a fine stretch of lawn before it. "How do you do, Mrs. Carson? Mr. Hildreth thought you might like some early tomatoes for supper."

A stout gray-haired woman had come out from the beautifully paneled door and Richard performed the introductions. Mrs. Carson was voluble in her thanks and suggested that the "young ladies" might like to go through the buildings.

"If you'll come, too," whispered Rosemary to Richard, pressing closer to him.

Mrs. Carson was a rather handsome woman and there was efficiency and competency in every crisp fold of her immaculate gingham dress and every neat coil of her iron-gray hair. No doubt the Board of Freeholders was to be congratulated on its choice of a matron for the poor farm —but it was awe she inspired in the minds of the three girls before her. Not for worlds

would they have left the safe companionship of sunny, kind-hearted Richard and gone on a tour alone with this formidable personage.

"Where are the people who live here?" whispered Sarah, when they had been led through spotless corridors, glistening with varnish and covered with bright linoleum, into orderly rooms stiffly furnished and showing no signs of use and out again on to the porch tiled in red and supported with white columns.

It was a question Rosemary had been debating, too.

"Oh, they're out back—there's a porch there they can use," said Mrs. Carson carelessly. "Some of 'em spend the time in their dormitories—just puttering around. The old ones are so messy I can't have them out here or it would never be clean; and the young ones work in the kitchen, mornings. Now if you'll come upstairs, I'll show you the bathrooms your brother had installed for us."

Richard had explained that they were Doctor Hugh's sisters and Mrs. Carson was determined to show them every courtesy. They saw the large kitchen at last, with three young girls, in blue dresses made exactly alike, scraping carrots, and four old women peeling potatoes, and

then went out to the back lawn where half a dozen old people dozed in the glare of the hot sun.

"You needn't bother to speak to them," said Mrs. Carson. "Most of them are deaf."

But Rosemary, catching several indignant glances darted at the speaker, doubted this.

"I hope you'll come over again," Mrs. Carson said, walking with them to the wagon after they had, as she expressed it, "seen everything."

"Tell Mr. Hildreth he'll be a popular man tonight when we have those tomatoes for supper," she added. "The old folks would rather have something they like to eat than any other kind of gift; and our tomatoes are late this year."

Yes, she meant to be kind—one could see that, thought Rosemary, mechanically holding on to Shirley as Solomon speeded up in his haste to reach the home barn.

She was very silent during the return drive and busied with her own thoughts. Richard's quizzical announcement, "This car doesn't go any further—end of the line, lady," woke her from her dreaming to find that they were home.

As she lightly jumped to the ground, she put the gist of her meditations into words:

"No," said Rosemary with conviction. "No, I wouldn't want to live at the poor farm!"

Sarah remained untroubled by any idea of living at the poor farm, but at the supper table that night she had an individual announcement to make.

"All those people weren't deaf," she said placidly.

"How do you know?" Rosemary asked in astonishment.

"I found out," Sarah answered, buttering her mashed potato lavishly.

"But how?" insisted Rosemary, not without anxiety. One never knew what Sarah would do next.

That small girl grinned impishly.

"I asked one old lady," she replied. "She said she wasn't. And that's how I know."

CHAPTER XVI

SARAH'S SURPRISE

WINNIE folded up a pair of stockings and dropped them into the capacious bag which hung on the arm of her chair.

"It beats me," she said conversationally, "where Sarah runs to every afternoon. It's been going on now for three weeks and she shuts up like a clam when I ask her any questions."

Winnie and Mrs. Willis were seated in the cool, shaded living-room with their mending. It was an intensely warm afternoon and several degrees cooler inside the house than on the porch. Winnie insisted on helping with the darning—she would have felt hurt had she been denied the task of mating and sorting and mending the stockings and socks for the family each week—and she took pride in assisting Mrs. Willis to keep Doctor Hugh's belongings in perfect order.

"Mother!" Rosemary hurried in, her hair a tangle of waves and ringlets dampened from

heat and perspiration, her cheeks like scarlet poppies and her eyes glowing with enthusiasm. "Mother, I've thought of something!"

"Rosemary leads an exciting life," Jack Welles had once declared in Mrs. Willis' hearing. "She can get all worked up about anything she happens to be thinking about."

Rosemary's mother remembered this speech now, smiling a little at the recollection.

"Richard and Warren are down in the tomato field, working their heads off in this broiling sun," said Rosemary more picturesquely than accurately. "And Mother, couldn't I make lemonade and take it down to them?"

"We have lemons," put in Winnie.

Mrs. Willis nodded approval.

"Make plenty, dear," she said cordially. "Don't put in too much sugar, for the boys don't like it so sweet; but why not wait an hour until it is cooler?"

"Oh, Mother, let me do it now—they'll like it when they're working hard. Where's Shirley? She could carry the cups," and Rosemary paused in her flight kitchenwards.

"Shirley is asleep—don't wake her," cautioned the mother. "Ask Sarah to help you, dear; she is out in the barn. And do keep out of the sun as much as you can, dear."

"Yes'm," promised Rosemary obediently, disappearing.

"I'll go crack the ice," said Winnie, rising. "There's no use in making the kitchen look like Niagara Falls, if a little forethought can prevent it."

Rosemary was a quick worker and a neat one, when she didn't have to chop ice, and she soon had a shiny white enamel pail half filled with delicious cold lemonade. She poured out two generous glasses for her mother and Winnie and carried them in with her compliments and then set off expeditiously, carrying pail, dipper and three cups, a feat that required her closest attention.

"Sarah!" she called when she reached the barn.

"What?" called back Sarah, not very graciously.

"Please come help me take some lemonade to the boys?"

Sarah put her head out of the barn door and eyed the pail thirstily.

"Let me have some?" she begged.

"If you'll help me carry these things," said Rosemary. "I brought three cups and there's enough lemonade for everyone."

"Well—all right, I'll help you," decided Sarah, "but I'm thirsty now."

"The ice will melt if you're going to talk all day," said Rosemary, the blazing sun making her more impatient than usual. "Come help me first and drink your lemonade after we get down to the tomato field."

Sarah darted back into the barn and reappeared in a moment with Bony, the pig, under her arm.

"Sarah Willis! You can't carry that filthy pig and help me lug this pail, too—put him down," scolded Rosemary.

"Bony isn't filthy—he's had a bath this morning!" flared Sarah. "He's just as clean as any person, so there. And I want to show Richard and Warren what he can do."

"You know what Hugh would say if he saw you fussing with a pig and then coming around food without washing your hands," Rosemary reminded her. "If there is one thing Hugh won't stand, it's to have you handle pets and then come to the table without scrubbing your hands. You know that, Sarah."

"I'm not coming to any table," insisted Sarah. "Besides Bony is clean, I tell you. If I can't bring him I won't come at all."

The walk down to the tomato field was long and hot, and Rosemary could not hurry unless

she had someone to share the weight of the pail which would, she knew, grow heavier at each step. She capitulated.

"But keep Bony on the other side of you," she commanded Sarah. "I don't see why he can't walk; do you carry him everywhere he goes?"

Sarah tucked the pig under one arm and gave the other hand to the handle of the pail.

"Bony can walk, but I am saving his strength," she remarked with a dignity worthy of Winnie. "You wait till you see what a smart pig he is, Rosemary; no one appreciates him except me."

Warren and Richard, bending over the long rows of tomatoes, straightened up in surprise as Rosemary's clear call came down to them.

"Stay up by the fence—you'll get your dress stained!" shouted Warren. "We'll come over."

"Ye gods, lemonade!" ejaculated Richard when he was near enough to hear the inviting tinkle of ice.

"And a pig!" grinned Warren. "Isn't Bony too heavy to cart around on a day like this, Sarah?"

Sarah shook her head in negation, but remained silent.

"You must be baked!" Rosemary looked with sympathy at the two flushed faces.

Both boys looked warm and tired, but they averred stoutly that no one minded the heat "after they were used to it." They declared that nothing had ever tasted as good as the lemonade.

"What made you think of bringing us it?" asked Warren, sitting down on an overturned crate after his second cup and mopping his face with his handkerchief.

"Oh, last winter Jack Welles and the high school boys were shoveling snow, we took them hot coffee and doughnuts," said Rosemary carelessly. "I suppose I must have remembered how much they liked something warm to drink—and you like something cold just as much, don't you?"

"We sure do," agreed Richard warmly. "This Jack Welles is coming up next week, isn't he? Mr. Hildreth is counting on him for two weeks."

Rosemary moved the pail beyond the reach of Sarah who seemed to have developed an excessive thirst.

"Jack and Hugh are both coming next Sunday," she answered. "You'll like Jack, Warren, and so will you, Richard. He lives next door to us, you know."

"Well, I only hope he's used to hard work," said Richard. "How old is he, Rosemary? Almost sixteen? I don't suppose he has ever picked tomatoes from sunup to sundown, but the cannery opens next week and we'll be picking steadily until it closes. Mr. Hildreth is shipping some crates to-day, but the real picking starts when the cannery opens. We're counting on Jack to make a third hand."

"He'll want to go fishing," declared Sarah. "Jack doesn't care how much he hurts the poor fish, jabbing hooks into them."

Sarah and Jack had had more than one violent argument over this question.

"It isn't cruel to go fishing," said Rosemary impatiently, thinking how tired Warren looked.

"I haven't been this year," announced Richard, "though they say there are several good streams near here. Sundays I seem to lack ambition and during the week, of course, there isn't time."

Sarah edged a little nearer the pail.

"You wouldn't catch fish would you, Warren?" she asked coaxingly.

Warren looked at her and grinned.

"Not only would I catch them," he told her, " but I'd eat them; if we are to have fish to eat,

Sarah, someone must catch them for us. The same way with roast chicken for Sunday dinner and roast pork, you know; they don't grow on bushes."

Sarah's eyes turned to Bony, now lying comfortably sprawled across her lap. She was sitting on the ground and Rosemary beside her.

"I never would eat Bony!" she said in a horror-stricken tone.

"No, of course not," Richard put in quickly, "but you'd eat a pig you were not acquainted with, wouldn't you?"

Sarah was most uncomfortable. She liked roast pork and in winter was fond of little sausages. And now here was Richard telling her that pigs—like Bony—had to be killed before one could have roast pork to eat.

"Never mind, Sarah," said Rosemary, taking pity on her sister. "You don't have to think about what you eat—just don't try to make everyone see your way and don't argue so much and eat what Winnie gives you and you'll have nothing to worry about."

Warren laughed and held out his cup as Rosemary lifted the dipper invitingly.

"In other words, Sarah," he counseled, "don't be so valiant a reformer."

"What's a reformer?" demanded Sarah, eyeing the pail anxiously.

"You're one when you try to stop your friends from going fishing," Warren informed her. "That's the whole trouble with reform—no one is willing to improve himself and let his neighbor alone; for all you know, Sarah, you drive Jack Welles fishing in self-defense. Perhaps, if you let him alone, he wouldn't go at all."

Sarah stared, but Rosemary nodded.

"I don't know about Jack," said Rosemary, "but I do know that as soon as someone says it isn't right to do such and such a thing, I always want to do it. And it may be something I never thought of before."

"Like coasting down hill backward," contributed Sarah.

Rosemary dimpled and Warren, who had been uneasily thinking they ought to go back to the vines, resolved to wait a few minutes longer.

"Did you coast backward?" asked Richard with interest. "What happened?"

"Oh, I ran into another sled and cut my wrist and nearly broke the legs of the two boys on the other sled," Rosemary recited. "The trouble was I never would have thought of it, if it hadn't

been for Miss Johnson. She's a woman who lives in Eastshore and she's forever scolding about girls—the way they 'carry on,' she calls it. I happened to hear her say that no nice, well-brought up girl would make herself conspicuous on a coasting hill."

"So you thought up the most conspicuous way of getting down the hill and did it?" suggested Richard.

"Well, it turned out more conspicuous than I intended," Rosemary acknowledged. "I never intended to tangle up three or four sleds and have the news get around that there had been an accident on the hill. Mother was so frightened when she heard of it—remember, Sarah?"

Sarah remembered. But she was more interested in the lemonade.

"There's some left, Rosemary," she tactfully declared.

"You've had enough," said Rosemary.

Richard rose to his feet at a significant glance from Warren. It was pleasant to rest a few moments, but the driving force of waiting work had not relaxed, merely slowed down.

"I wish I could help you," said Rosemary, simply and sincerely.

"What do you call it you've just been doing?" answered Warren. "Picking tomatoes isn't so hard, but it is monotonous; giving us a little break in the day is something that counts big, Rosemary."

"Well, anyway, Jack will be here to-morrow to help you," said Rosemary. "Then perhaps you won't have to work so hard—many hands make light work, Winnie says."

"Now what," said Richard thoughtfully, "should you say was troubling the small Sarah at this moment?"

Sarah, cut off from the supply of lemonade, had turned her back on the others and was busily disgorging an assortment of articles from her blouse. When she whirled around upon the astonished group it was apparent that she had secreted upon her small person a pair of baby shoes, a doll's dress and a small parasol. In these her pig, Bony, was now arrayed.

"You want to look at my pig!" she announced in clarion tones. "He can do tricks!"

"Tricks!" echoed Richard, while Rosemary rapidly identified the dress as belonging to Shirley's largest doll, ditto the parasol, and the shoes as a pair of Sarah's own carefully treasured for years by Winnie.

"What kind of tricks?" demanded Warren.

"You wait and see—" Sarah was so excited her voice trembled. "I taught him lots of things. I've been teaching him every afternoon in the barn—he is a naturally bright pig."

Her audience was inclined to share her opinion, after watching Bony perform. The pig walked up and down before them in the absurd costume, twirling the parasol and bowing to each in turn as he passed.

He danced, very mincingly, to a tune Sarah played for him on the harmonica—Rosemary wondered how many other treasures Sarah's blouse could hold—and though Richard said that no pig, no matter how highly educated, could hope to identify that tune, it was admitted that Bony was a graceful dancer.

"He can wear spectacles and read a book, too," declared Sarah proudly, "but I couldn't bring them!"

Like all managers of celebrities she had begun to experience the tyranny of the "props."

"Well, you must have had a heap of patience," commented Warren admiringly. "Can he do anything else, Sarah?"

"Jump through a hoop," enumerated Sarah, "push a doll carriage and walk around carrying

a doll like a baby—I broke two of Shirley's china dolls, teaching him that trick, but she doesn't know it yet. And, oh, yes, he can sweep—with a toy broom—and play a toy piano."

"So that's where all Shirley's toys have gone to!" Rosemary tried to speak severely, but she ended by laughing. "Shirley has been missing her playthings, one after the other," Rosemary explained to the boys. "And we thought she took them outdoors to play with and forgot where she left them."

"After supper to-night," said Sarah, calmly ignoring this disclosure, "I'll give an exhibition in the barn."

CHAPTER XVII

WILLING AND OBLIGING

SARAH was as good as her word. She not only assembled the entire Rainbow Hill family in the barn that evening and put Bony through his paces, but she continued to give "exhibitions" whenever and wherever she could assemble an audience of one or more. Eventually she took Bony over to the Gay farm and delighted the children there who thought he was absolutely the most clever pig they had ever seen and Sarah the most wonderful trainer.

The fame of Bony spread abroad and gradually Sarah's family grew accustomed to having a horse and wagon drive in, usually with a couple of empty milk cans rattling around in the back showing that the driver was on his way home from the daily trip to the creamery; and to hearing a knock at the door, followed by a voice asking, "Is the little girl in—the one with the pig?"

Answered in the affirmative, the inevitable request would be: "Do you think she would mind

letting me see him do tricks? They tell me, down to the creamery" (or at the store or the postoffice) "that he is sure a smart pig."

These requests pleased Sarah immensely. She would sally forth importantly and rout Bony out of his comfortable box, present him as one would introduce a famous artist and put him through his program. The audience never failed to be pleased and grateful and to be generous with praises. Warren declared that there was small danger of Bony ever forgetting his accomplishments for hardly a day passed that he wasn't "billed to appear."

But before Bony attained this place in the limelight, Doctor Hugh and Jack Welles arrived for their promised two weeks' visit and vacation. Even her marvelous pig could not hope to compete with these arrivals and Sarah's interest in Bony slackened slightly though she kept him rigorously in training.

The doctor and Jack came in the former's car. It was difficult to say whose disappointment was keenest when Jack announced that he intended to sleep at the bungalow and eat at Mr. Hildreth's table—Mrs. Willis, Winnie and Rosemary were equally dismayed.

"Jack dear, I thought of course you'd live

with us," protested Mrs. Willis. "You know we'll love to have you and I'm afraid you won't be comfortable at the bungalow."

"It won't be any kind of a vacation for you," declared Rosemary. "You'll have to get up at five o'clock because they have breakfast at six; and Mrs. Hildreth won't let you put a book or a paper out of place—Richard says so."

"I'm not saying anything against her cooking," pronounced Winnie, through the screen door, where she had been drawn by the argument. "But I tell you this in all honesty, Jack Welles; Mrs. Hildreth puts too much salt in her oatmeal, to my way of thinking, and she skimps on the shortening in her pie crust."

Jack glanced across the porch at Doctor Hugh, who was seated in the swing with Rosemary.

"This isn't a vacation, you know," said Jack mildly. "I've hired out, at wages, and I'm to go to work to-morrow morning. And it is in the agreement that Mr. Hildreth is to 'board and lodge' me."

"Well, you can work for him and live here with us, too," suggested Rosemary comfortably. "Can't he, Mother?"

"It's ever so nice of you to want me," said

Jack, "but you see, I've figured out that I want the complete experience; I want to get up when the other hired men do and eat breakfast when they do—Winnie wouldn't like to get me a six o'clock breakfast for the next two weeks—and I wouldn't let her, if she did."

"Richard doesn't think you'll stick it out for the whole two weeks," offered the placid Sarah, looking up from the book she was sharing with Shirley on the grass rug. "He said so."

Jack flushed, Doctor Hugh looked annoyed and Mrs. Willis sighed. Sarah's remarks usually aroused varied emotions.

"I think Jack is quite right," said the doctor firmly, before anyone could speak. "He wants to see this thing through and while he knows I'd like first rate to have him stay here at the house, I think he'd be handicapped from the start. There'll be the evenings left him, anyway, and Sundays—two of them at least."

"You must come to us for Sunday dinner," planned Mrs. Willis instantly. "I'll ask Richard and Warren, too; Winnie has wanted me to for some time, but there never seemed to be a mutually convenient time."

So Jack took his suit case over to the bungalow and was introduced to the little room next

to the one shared by Warren and Richard. He had met Mr. and Mrs. Hildreth on one of his trips to Rainbow Hill with Doctor Hugh, but he had not seen Warren and Richard till this afternoon.

The three boys shook hands pleasantly. Jack was the youngest by a couple of years and not so deeply tanned; though, being an active lad and fond of outdoor sports, he had acquired a coat of brown since the closing of school. But he felt, looking at the other two, that he lacked their muscular advantage and a certain hardness that bespoke sturdy endurance.

"I'm ready to go to work," said Jack, in response to a question from Mr. Hildreth. "I've brought overalls and I'm said to be willing and obliging."

Richard grinned and Warren's gray eyes smiled.

"Well, I hope you'll tumble up early in the morning," observed the farmer, his mind busy already with the next day's work. "We're going to start picking tomatoes for the cannery."

There wasn't much thrill about the persistent ringing of the alarm clock the next morning and Jack turned over with a groan. The dial said five o'clock, though he was sure he had not been asleep longer than two hours.

"Morning," was Mr. Hildreth's brief greeting when he met his new hand at the back door. "Glad to see you made it. Warren's your boss —he knows what has to be done. You'll find him out in the barn, milking."

Even a careless observer—and Jack was not that—would have been struck with the dewy freshness of the grass and shrubbery and the magnificent splendor of the Eastern sky; and Jack, on his way to the barn, drew a deep breath of something like contentment.

"Not so bad," he thought, beginning to whistle. "Not so bad, after all."

Warren glanced up from his milking, his eyes cordial, his busy hands continuing their task.

"Mr. Hildreth said you're my boss," said Jack directly. "What do you want me to do?"

"You can't milk, can you?" replied Warren. "No, of course, you haven't been around cows. Richard is feeding and cleaning the horses—you might help him."

Jack was inclined to remember the remark Sarah had attributed to Richard, but five minutes spent in that cheerful youth's company were enough to dispel any faint resentment he might feel. Richard liked to chatter and he liked to sing and whistle; and while he showed Jack what

constituted a proper breakfast for a horse and how these useful beasts should be groomed, he kept up a running fire of comment and good-natured musical effort that made up in volume what it lacked in depth. By the time Warren's pails were full and the barn work done, the three boys were on a friendly footing and they marched into breakfast to the tune of "There Were Three Crows Sat in a Tree."

Jack could have found it in his heart to wish that Mrs. Hildreth might think less of time and more of passing comfort. The dining-room of the bungalow was fully furnished, but the farmer's wife used it only on state occasions. It made less work, she said, to eat in the kitchen and she could "get through" a meal more rapidly and take fewer steps when those to be served were close to the stove.

It fell to the lot of Jack to be close to the stove this morning and he gave a momentary sigh for the coolness and order and daintiness that he knew would give atmosphere to the breakfast in Mrs. Willis' household. Not that he minded eating in the kitchen—he and his mother often did that when his father was away and thought it a lark; but he did mind the heat

and the haste and the silence in which this, his first meal with the Hildreths, was consumed.

"Ready?" said Warren briefly, when they had finished, leading the way to the barn.

They had been working in the barnyard and vegetable garden for an hour and were on their way to the tomato field—it was necessary to wait for the heavy dew to dry before they began to work among the vines—when the Willis family gathered for their breakfast at the round table set on the porch this warm morning in Doctor Hugh's honor.

"Hugh, will you come watch me wade in the brook?" asked Shirley, eating her cereal as though hypnotized and quite forgetting to protest that she didn't see why she had to drink milk.

"You wait till you see Bony, Hugh," Sarah told him. "He's the best pig you ever saw. He's bright."

"I wish, if you have time, Hugh," said Rosemary, "you'd show me what is the matter with the camera. Every picture I take is overexposed."

"For mercy's sake, let your brother rest," Winnie admonished them, bringing in a plate of fresh Parker House rolls. "He only gets a bit of a breathing spell and he doesn't want to

race from one end of this farm to the other. Take that large brown one, Hughie."

Mrs. Willis, behind the silver coffee pot, smiled at her son.

"Best rolls I ever ate, Winnie," he said appreciatively. "I'll bet if Mr. Greggs' wife could make rolls like these he'd be a sweeter-tempered carpenter. I'm going to have the finest of vacations and rest thoroughly by going everywhere with everybody. I'll watch you wade, Shirley; and I'll give Sarah my opinion of this remarkable pig; Rosemary and I will 'snap' the whole farm. But I wish it distinctly understood that Mother and I have an unbreakable engagement to take a drive every afternoon, or just after dinner, as she prefers."

"And won't you have to go see any sick people at all?" demanded Shirley, almost upsetting her glass of milk in the excitement of having a brother with time to spare.

"I left word with Mrs. Welles that I'd answer emergency calls, of course," explained Doctor Hugh, answering his mother's unspoken question. "I've arranged it so I won't have to go the hospital and, barring the unforeseen, I can count on a free fortnight. So we'll hope

there won't be any sick people to go see, Shirley."

"Where are you going, Rosemary?" the doctor hailed her as she and Sarah started down the lawn after breakfast was over.

"We thought we'd go down and see Jack," called Rosemary.

Doctor Hugh pushed open the screen door and came down the steps.

"Let Jack get his bearings first," he advised. "There is bound to be a number of new experiences for him this initial day and I think it will be kinder to let him get adjusted to his job. He'll be up this evening and you and Mother can play for him and cheer him up generally."

"Why—why—will he need cheering up?" Rosemary looked so startled that her brother laughed.

"Not precisely cheering up, perhaps," he said, "but a mental and physical rest. Jack is bound to have sore muscles, after a long day bending over tomato crates; he thinks he knows what it means to work, but he has never worked in his life as he will now. And I don't know, but I suspect, he may have a sore mind; Jack has never worked *for* anyone and he must learn to be

'bossed.' All in all, Rosemary, I'd put off going down to the tomato field till to-morrow."

"Well—all right," agreed Rosemary reluctantly. "I do think he might have stayed with us and then he would have had a better time."

"If we're not going down to the field, I'll go get Bony and take him down to the brook," said Sarah, quick to seize her advantage. "I can wash him while Shirley goes wading."

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW FRIEND

THEY spent the morning down at the brook. Shirley was enchanted to be allowed to help build a dam—the height of his ambition, Doctor Hugh whimsically told them. Shirley paddled around in the brook and brought him stones and he laid them in a chain that made a crude dam, both getting very warm and very wet and having a thoroughly enjoyable time of it.

Rosemary had brought the camera and snapped a dozen poses of the sunny-haired Shirley as she gamboled about with her skirts tucked up to her waist, looking like a particularly chubby elf. Doctor Hugh had done something to the camera that would, Rosemary was sure, correct her tendency to overexpose a film and the results fully justified her faith; whether it was due to his manipulation of the "innards" of the camera or his instructions to her, the prints were exceptionally good and clear.

Sarah, of course, devoted her morning to scrubbing the pig. The doctor's shouts of laughter could not persuade her to curtail the ceremony in the slightest detail. She had brought soap and towels and brush with her and she gravely scrubbed and rinsed and dried Bony and put him out in the sun to dry.

"He'll bake," protested Doctor Hugh, when, the pig's bath finished, Sarah arranged him on a dry towel in the sun. "You'll have roast pork, Sarah, if you're not careful."

"No I won't," answered Sarah confidently, straightening the pig's legs for him since he did not offer to move.

"Can't he even grunt?" demanded Doctor Hugh who had never seen an animal so willing to be waited upon.

"Of course he can grunt—" Sarah was indignant. "He can do anything."

"When the sun dries him on that side, she'll turn him over on the other," whispered Rosemary. "You'll see."

The dam was built, the roll of films used up and Bony dry and immaculate by the time Winnie rang the bell to tell them that lunch was ready.

"We must have a picnic," said Doctor Hugh

as they went up to the house, he carrying Shirley, who objected to putting on her socks and sandals, and Sarah carrying the pig with almost as much care. "I haven't been to a picnic in years."

That afternoon he carried his mother off for a drive in the car, and the three girls were left to their own devices. Rosemary's natural inclination was to find Jack and ask him how his day was going, but mindful of her brother's advice, she resolved to wait. She was playing jack stones with Shirley and Sarah when Mrs. Hildreth came hurrying across the lawn.

"Rosemary," she said, fanning her flushed face with her apron, "I wonder if you'd do me a favor. All the men are busy and I couldn't ask them to drop their work for such a trifle; and I have to grease the chickens for lice, so I can't go myself."

Mrs. Hildreth always seemed to choose the hottest days for the most unlovely tasks, reflected Rosemary, but Sarah held a different opinion.

"I'll come hold 'em for you, Mrs. Hildreth," she offered, rising in such haste that she almost knocked Shirley off the step. "I love to see you grease chickens!"

"All right, I do need somebody to help me," said Mrs. Hildreth gratefully. "Rosemary, Miss Clinton telephoned me this morning she wanted a dozen fresh eggs—why do they always say 'fresh eggs'?" she broke off irritably. " 'Tisn't likely I'd go out and get her a dozen stale eggs, even if I could find 'em. Well, she wants them this afternoon and I hate to disappoint her. She's kind of used to getting what she wants and everybody feels sorry for her. I know you like to walk and when I saw your mother and brother going off in the car, I says, 'Maybe she won't mind walking over there for me, having nothing else to do.' "

"I'll go," said Rosemary pleasantly, "but where does this Miss Clinton live?"

Mrs. Hildreth gave minute directions for finding the house. It was close to the road, the same road that went past the Gay farm, but in the opposite direction. It wasn't over a quarter of a mile and Rosemary was to knock on the door and when someone called "Come in" to lift the latch and enter.

"I'll take Shirley with me," said Rosemary, "and you'll tell Winnie, won't you, Mrs. Hildreth? She went down to the mail box at the

cross-roads to mail a letter and she'll wonder where we are when she comes back."

Mrs. Hildreth promised to tell Winnie and she and Sarah departed to begin their war on the chicken pests while Rosemary and Shirley set off to follow the back road to the little yellow house where Miss Clinton lived.

They found it without difficulty, knocked and heard someone call "Come in," just as Mrs. Hildreth had predicted.

"How do you do?" said the same voice when they stepped directly into a large square room. "I'm very glad to see you."

A very tiny old lady sat in a wheel chair in the center of the room. Her skin was almost as yellow as the paint on the house and considerably more wrinkled. She had bright black eyes that reminded Rosemary of a bird and little, eager claw-like hands that were strangely bird-like, too. She beamed at the girls, plainly delighted to have company.

"I'm glad you came," she said when Rosemary had given her the eggs and explained they were from Rainbow Hill. "Mrs. Hildreth told me the Hammonds rented their house this summer. Sit down and we'll talk. Let the little girl play with the toys in the cabinet—she won't hurt 'em."

The cabinet stood in one corner of the room and was well stocked with toys, some new, some well-worn. Shirley sat down on the floor and amused herself contentedly while Miss Clinton kept up a running fire of comment till Rosemary's wrist watch showed half-past four.

"I wish you'd come see me again," said the old lady wistfully. "I get lonesome for someone to talk to. I get around pretty good in this chair and I have lots of books and papers to read; but I like to talk and summers everyone is so busy they don't think to drop in."

"I'll drop in," promised Rosemary impulsively. "Mother would come to see you, too, but she couldn't walk this far; perhaps Hugh, my brother, will bring her some day."

"Let me have my knitting, if you're really going," said Miss Clinton regretfully. "It's there in that basket beside you. That's my sixth bedspread, or will be, when I get it finished."

"What beautiful work!" exclaimed Rosemary as the old lady spread the knitted square over her knee. "How fine it is—isn't it very difficult?"

"Not a bit," Miss Clinton assured her. "I do it when my eyes get tired of reading print. I'll teach you how to make a spread, if you'll come

see me now and then," she offered quickly. "They tell me they're worth seventy-five dollars apiece but I never sell mine; I give them to relatives and friends."

Rosemary and Shirley said good by and were half way down the path when the door was opened and Miss Clinton called after them:

"Bring the little girl with you, too; I'll get her something new to play with when she gets tired of the cabinet toys."

"Rosemary," said Shirley, skipping happily—she seldom walked, her brother said, but ran or hopped her way along—"Rosemary, what is there?"

"Where?" said Rosemary, puzzled.

"There," insisted Shirley, pointing behind her.

"Why, nothing—except Miss Clinton's house—you know that, Shirley," replied Rosemary.

"No, not Miss Clinton's house," said Shirley, shaking her head. "Next to that, Rosemary."

"You mean around the curve?" asked Rosemary, for the road curved sharply beyond the big maples that marked the line of Miss Clinton's property.

Shirley nodded.

"What is there?" she repeated.

"I don't know, dear," Rosemary admitted.

"I've never been that far. Do you want to go and see? We have time, I think."

Shirley slipped a small hand into her sister's.

"Let's go," she said eagerly.

Rosemary had often felt a curiosity to know what was beyond a bend in a road, but she never remembered making a deliberate attempt to gratify that feeling. Shirley, having been made curious, had no mind to go away unsatisfied.

They turned and walked back, Rosemary hoping the little old lady might not see them. But she was nowhere in sight and was, in all probability, absorbed in her knitting.

"Maybe the three bears live around the corner," suggested Shirley, beginning to regret her curiosity as they neared the turn.

"The Big Bear and the Middle Bear and the Little Bear?" said Rosemary. "I wonder if they do? In a cunning little house, Shirley, with three beds and three porridge bowls—wouldn't that be fun?"

Shirley pressed closer. She preferred to hear about the three bears, rather than meet them face to face.

A few minutes' walk brought them to the curve and around it—and there was a vegetable stand; almost a small market, with fruits and

garden produce attractively displayed and a number of boldly painted signs announcing that fresh eggs and dressed poultry were for sale on specified days of the week.

"Is it a store?" asked Shirley, much interested.

"It's like a store," Rosemary told her. "I remember Hugh was telling Mother something about this plan the other night. He said that down on the shore road he saw lots and lots of stands, when he spent his summers at Seapoint. And he was wondering why some of the farmers inland didn't do this—sell to people who have automobiles."

"Do people come and buy?" asked Shirley, staring at the tomatoes as though she had never seen that homely vegetable before.

"Yes, they come out in their cars, from Bennington and further away, I suppose," said Rosemary. "And they buy all this stuff fresh and take it home with them. I wonder who takes care of the stand?"

A sharp, thin, freckled face rose slowly from behind the tiers of baskets and a reedy voice announced, "I do—want to buy anything?"

Rosemary jumped. She had not known there was anyone near. Now she saw the owner of

the freckled face was a girl, a few years older than herself.

"Do you take care of the stand?" Rosemary asked, smiling her friendly smile.

The freckle-faced one nodded.

"That's my job summers," she confided. "Winters I'm studying. I'm going to be a school teacher. What are you going to be?"

Rosemary pulled Shirley back from a contemplated investigation of a basket of early pears.

"Why—I don't believe I know," she answered the question. "I've thought of being a nurse—my brother Hugh is a doctor; or I might be a music teacher."

"I'm going to teach school," the other girl declared again. "I'm going to have some pretty dresses and go to the city every Saturday, if I have a mind to. What's your name?"

"Rosemary Willis," Rosemary answered meekly. "This is my sister, Shirley."

"I'm Edith Barrow," the girl announced. "I don't live here, except in summer. I help Mr. and Mrs. Mains—know them?"

Rosemary shook her head.

"We're here for the summer," she replied.

"Renters," said Edith Barrow as though that catalogued the Willis family as perhaps it did.

"Well, when I'm going to school I live with my aunt. She boards students. I don't suppose you're in high school yet?"

"Don't touch those onions, Shirley," Rosemary warned. "No, I'm not in high school—not for a year. In June I'll graduate from the Eastshore grammar school," she explained.

"Do you like keeping store?" asked Shirley, who had kept still longer than usual. She may have thought it was her turn to ask questions.

"This isn't a store—it's a stand," Edith corrected her. "Yes, I like it well enough. I took in twelve dollars yesterday. You have to be good at arithmetic to make change; that's why Mr. Mains likes me to be out here. Mrs. Mains can't tell how much money to give back when she gets a bill from a customer."

"Have you any candy?" was Shirley's next query.

"Not a bit," Edith Barrow answered. "Only things that are good for you to eat. Candy makes you sick. Did you know that?"

Rosemary couldn't help thinking that, young as she was, Edith already talked like a school teacher.

"Like the fussy kind," Rosemary emended to herself.

"Here comes a car now," said the young saleswoman suddenly. "They're going to stop—I know them. I hope they'll want tomatoes today. We haven't much else."

"We'll have to go," Rosemary declared hastily. "Good by—say good by, Shirley."

"She isn't looking at me," complained Shirley and indeed Edith was centering her attention on the coming car and her thoughts were evidently all for the approaching sale.

"Jack would say she was chasing success," Rosemary told herself smiling as she took Shirley's hand and led her away.

Doctor Hugh and his mother were on the porch when Rosemary and Shirley reached the house, but Sarah was nowhere in sight. When a few minutes later she walked out among them, radiantly clean, attired in fresh tan linen, her shining dark hair neatly brushed, her family welcomed her with delighted surprise.

"How nice you look!" said her mother appreciatively.

"I wish you could have seen her half an hour ago," announced Winnie from the doorway.

Her words were in direct opposition to her desire, for she went on to say that she had met Sarah as the latter came from the chicken yard.

"She was grease from head to foot," pronounced Winnie, while Sarah sat down on the rug and looked innocent. "You'd have thought, to look at her, that Mrs. Hildreth had been greasing her and not the chickens; there were feathers in her hair and dirt ground into her face and hands, and she must have been sitting in the dust pile where the chickens scratch. I had to give her a bath and change every stitch of her clothes, because I was afraid you wouldn't know her. And if dinner is late to-night, you can thank Sarah Eaton Willis."

"I'll come set the table." offered Rosemary, jumping up.

As she laid the knives and forks, she told Winnie about her visit to Miss Clinton.

"I know her," declared Winnie, slicing bread —she had fastened back the communicating door between the kitchen and the dining-room. "At least I know of her; Mrs. Hildreth was telling me the other day. She's a woman who likes company—that's all she wants and all she doesn't get, summer times at least. I never saw a neighborhood like this one—I don't believe any of the farmers dare die in July or August for fear their friends couldn't stop farming long enough to come to the funeral."

Rosemary giggled.

"Is she poor, Winnie?" she asked with frank curiosity.

"My, no, not that I have heard tell of," answered Winnie. "She has an income of her own and plenty of relatives, scattered hereabouts. I believe a niece comes and stays with her during the winter months—her brother's daughter. Mrs. Hildreth was telling me that she writes hundreds of letters—though I guess she can't write as many as that—and she wheels herself out to the mail box and back in that chair and washes dishes and everything, sitting in it. But summers she gets fearfully lonesome. The neighbors run in a good deal in the winter and hold sewing-circle meetings there, but they haven't time to bother in the growing season."

"She had toys in a cabinet—Shirley played with them and she said she'd get her some more if she tired of those," said Rosemary, placing the chairs. "Do many children go see her, Winnie?"

"Mrs. Hildreth told me she keeps those toys to amuse the children who may come visiting with their mothers," explained Winnie. "Miss Clinton figured that if the children had something to play with they wouldn't be in a hurry to go home. Downright pathetic, I call it, to

be so hungry for someone to talk to that you try to bribe people to stay a little longer."

"I'm going to see her," Rosemary said, as she filled the water glasses. "I told her I'd come—it isn't far to go and I have plenty of time. Can I do anything more, Winnie?"

"Nothing except to tell your mother dinner is ready," was Winnie's grateful reply. "You are the handiest child, sometimes, Rosemary, and I declare I don't know how I should have got dinner on the table to-night without a bit of a lift. I hate to be late, too, when Hughie is here."

"I hope Jack comes up to talk to-night," said Rosemary as they sat down at the table. "I want to know if it is fun to earn your own living. I'm going to try it myself some day."

CHAPTER XIX

JACK—HIRED MAN

IT wasn't all fun, Jack assured her when, soon after dinner, he came toiling up the grass path and mounted the porch steps wearily.

"I never was so tired in my life," he declared. "Gee, I thought I was 'hard' enough—I've been fishing lots since school closed and that isn't a lazy man's work especially if you wade upstream. I've hiked miles and I've worked in the garden at home; but at this minute I have three hundred and ninety-eight muscles creaking in my machinery that I never knew before existed."

Doctor Hugh tossed him an extra sofa cushion and Jack stuffed it behind his back as he sat in one of the comfortable wicker chairs.

"Where's Richard and Warren?" demanded Sarah. "I want to tell them about greasing the chickens. Jack, did you ever grease chickens?"

"Now look here, Sarah," protested Doctor Hugh hastily, "we've listened to the unsavory

details of that process once and not even for Jack's sake can we go through it again. Besides, Jack has a recital of his own; you come sit with me and we'll listen to an agricultural lecture."

Sarah and Shirley both rushed to accept the invitation and after some skirmishing managed to squeeze into the one big chair.

"Warren and Richard have gone down to the brook," reported Jack. "Mr. Hildreth thinks someone from town is gigging there nights and they want to keep a watch. I haven't enough ambition to catch a worm, let alone a gigger."

"What's gigging?" cried Sarah, twisting about so that she placed her feet in Rosemary's lap.

"Gigging is fishing at night," said Jack briefly. "I'll show you sometime—when I can bend my knees again."

Doctor Hugh adroitly shifted the wandering feet by turning Sarah back to her original position.

"The first day is always the hardest," he said encouragingly. "You will live through to-morrow, if that's any comfort, Jack."

"Well, of course, I'm not complaining," Jack declared. "I don't expect to pick roses—ouch! —and I won't grunt. But that tomato field must be twenty miles long!"

Rosemary played for him presently and Mrs. Willis brought out the drop cakes she had "saved" for him, and before it was nine o'clock—his self-imposed bed-time—Jack felt more cheerful in spirit if not in muscle.

But the days that followed tested his spirit severely. It was, as Doctor Hugh had said, an entirely new experience for him to work for anyone else and to work straight through a hot summer day with a brief noon hour and no free time planned. There were even a number of chores to be done after supper. "Vacation" to Jack had hitherto meant long, cloudless days with leisure to read lazily in the hammock, or go swimming when he pleased and license to grumble when his father suggested that a little weeding would do the garden no harm.

It had not occurred to Jack, when he so blithely decided to hire out to Mr. Hildreth, that he was contracting to give six days of labor—and part of the seventh—as a week's work; he had not thought much about it, but somewhere in the back of his mind there had been a hazy scheme of affairs that included a day or two off, when it should be convenient for him—free days which he would spend fishing with Doctor Hugh and "playing around" with Rosemary and Sarah and

Shirley. He was surprised to find that fishing and kindred sports had no place on Warren and Richard's schedule; work was a serious thing to them and in their experience money was not to be easily earned.

Jack said little, but an undercurrent of friction began to develop between him and Warren though to do him justice Warren was more than ordinarily thoughtful and ready to make every allowance for Jack's inexperience. But naturally the issuing of orders fell to him and he was made responsible for the volume of work accomplished each day. Mr. Hildreth permitted no excuses for failure in tasks set and though extremely just he had a shrewd and accurate knowledge of the time required for each chore and the amount of finished work to be turned out each hour.

Jack and Richard "hit it off together" very well, too well, in fact; they began to "fool," to skylark and, insensibly, waste time. When Warren interfered it was in the rôle of kill-joy, a character he did not fancy. When, on his return from driving a load of tomatoes to the cannery one afternoon, instead of finding filled crates ready for a second trip, he discovered that neither boy had picked a tomato and that they

had broken several crates and mashed a quantity of ripe tomatoes in good-natured tussling, Warren spoke sharply and to the point. He sent Jack to one end of a row and Richard to the other and kept them separated the remainder of the afternoon.

The team was another grievance. Jack was sure he could be trusted to drive Solomon and his mate to the cannery and back and this hauling afforded a welcome break in a monotonous day. But Mr. Hildreth flatly refused to allow Jack to handle the horses and either he or Warren made the twice a day trip to the Center.

"I'll quit to-morrow," said Jack desperately, night after night.

And in the morning he would decide to stick it out another day.

Twice he went to sleep in his chair on the porch of the little white house, waking to find that Mrs. Hildreth and the girls had gone to bed and left Doctor Hugh, reading quietly under the lamp, to keep him company.

"Nothing to be ashamed of," said the doctor when Jack stammered his apology. "After a day of honest toil, Nature's going to exact her toll. You'll be as hard as nails, Jack, if you keep this up."

The girls soon accepted the idea that Jack was not free to go about with them and made their plans without including him. Rosemary went nearly every day to see Miss Clinton, on some pretext or other, and Shirley often accompanied her. Rosemary was rapidly learning to knit the blocks for a bedspread with which she intended to surprise her mother. Sarah gave most of her time and attention to Bony, but she also visited the Gays though, in the excitement and pleasure of having Doctor Hugh at their beck and call, it is to be regretted that the Gay family were left more to themselves than Rosemary or her sisters intended.

Jack's irritation culminated in the second week of his contract. True to her promise, Mrs. Willis had asked the three boys to Sunday dinner and, under the mellowing influence of Winnie's best cooking and the friendly atmosphere of the little white house, the tension had relaxed and the afternoon spent on the porch had been restful for at least three of the group and happy for all.

"I'm going fishing to-morrow," announced Doctor Hugh, a night or two later. "The alarm clock is set for four and I'm coming home when the last nibble plays me false."

"Care if I go along?" said Jack impulsively. "I haven't had a bit of fishing since I've been here. I brought my rod and tackle in case I had a chance, but I haven't unpacked them yet."

The creak of the swing ceased suddenly. Warren had been swaying back and forth gently in the darkness.

"Why—no—come along, if it's all right," said the doctor, after a moment's hesitation.

"I'll meet you at the barn," promised Jack. "Gee, it will seem good to take a day off."

Still Warren said nothing. The three boys had said good night and walked almost to the bungalow before he spoke.

"Are you really planning to go fishing tomorrow, Jack?" he asked quietly.

"Of course," said Jack shortly.

"What about the work?"

"One day out won't wreck the crops," hazarded Jack.

"Don't stand here arguing all night," urged Richard. "Come on—I'm going to bed."

Warren paid no attention and continued to address Jack.

"If you don't turn out in the morning I'll know you've quit," he said.

"I'm not fired till Mr. Hildreth says so," angrily retorted Jack.

"You work to-morrow, or you're through," declared Warren, a steel edge to his voice. "I'm bossing this job and it doesn't happen to be one that can wait anyone's personal convenience."

They tramped upstairs to their rooms, Jack inwardly seething. He took off one shoe and hurled it across the bed as a relief to his feelings.

He'd show Warren Baker! It was a pity if a fellow had to ask him every time he wanted a few hours to himself—he didn't have to have money, anyway—he'd let the old job slide. He had come up voluntarily to "hire out" and he didn't intend to be treated like a day laborer.

The other shoe followed the first.

Richard had said he wouldn't "stick it out" for two weeks. Perhaps he ought not to quit with the time so nearly gone. Mr. Hildreth would, of course, uphold Warren. He would hate to be left short-handed in such beautiful picking weather, but he would not condone a fishing trip. And there was his record—Jack was secretly rather proud of that; he and Richard were keeping count of the number of crates each picked daily and Jack had high hopes of outdistancing Richard before the end of the week. Maybe he might stay his week out—just to show Richard!

Doctor Hugh waited twenty minutes for Jack the next morning, then rightly concluded that he had changed his mind. Warren, meeting Jack in the barn at the usual hour, said "good morning" pleasantly, but Jack merely gave a curt nod. He might be working, but there was no reason why he should pretend to like it, he said to himself childishly.

He went about his chores jerkily, still "sore" as Richard described it and, as industrial statistics demonstrate, ill temper lowers our guard; another time Jack might have been more careful, but this morning he caught his finger on a nail in the harness room and tore an ugly gash down its brown length.

He said nothing about the accident, washed the cut as well as he could and went doggedly to work after breakfast at the interminable rows of tomatoes.

Doctor Hugh and his car returned with a most respectable "catch" about four o'clock that afternoon and the lucky fisherman suggested that company be asked to dinner to enjoy the fish.

"I never saw such acting boys—never!" scolded Rosemary, who had volunteered to be the messenger. "They won't any of them come! Warren said he was too tired to talk to anyone

and Jack said 'No'—just like that—he is too cross for words! And then Richard said if they were going to act like ninnies he wasn't going to come and make excuses for them, so he said 'No thank you,' too."

"Jack has a sore finger," said Sarah wisely. "I heard Richard tell him he ought to take care of it and Jack told him to mind his own affairs."

"Well, it's been a warm day and perhaps they're entitled to be cross," said Doctor Hugh pacifically. "We'll send Mrs. Hildreth three of the fish and if she fries them as well as Winnie does, there may be a peace treaty signed."

CHAPTER XX

A LITTLE GIRL LOST

MRS. HILDRETH may not have been as good a cook as Winnie. Whatever the reason, no one came whistling up from the bungalow after dinner to suggest "Let's hear 'Old Black Joe,' " or to offer to play a game of croquet. Presently Doctor Hugh announced that he was going to walk down to see Jack, and Rosemary went with him. Sarah and Shirley were, with some difficulty, persuaded to remain behind.

"Nobody home," was Richard's disconsolate greeting as he rose from the porch railing. "Mr. Hildreth has gone across fields to borrow some more crates and Mrs. Hildreth is setting bread in the kitchen. Warren has gone to the Center and Jack is nursing a grouch upstairs."

"Well, I came to see Jack," said the doctor. "I'll go up in a minute."

"He and Warren are on the outs," declared Richard frankly. "Each one thinks he is a Roman candle."

"How perfectly horrid of Warren!" said Rosemary hotly.

"Warren?" echoed the bewildered Richard. "What has Warren done to you?"

"He hasn't done anything to me—" Rosemary's color began to rise. "But I don't think he is one bit fair to Jack."

Before Richard could argue this, the door opened and Jack came out. He had heard voices and perhaps wished to discourage the intention of the doctor to come up and see him. He sat down on the opposite side of the step from Rosemary and her brother and put one hand carelessly behind him.

"Hello!" he said grumpily.

"Say, those fish were fine," declared Richard, feeling his responsibility as host, since Jack did not seem moved to speech. "They were so fresh, I could almost see 'em leaping out of the brook. You must have had good luck."

"First-rate," said the doctor. "Sorry you couldn't come up to the house for dinner, Rich."

"Well, I could have come," admitted Richard cautiously, "but I'm no good presenting regrets for others. Warren and Jack were peeved—"

"You needn't make any excuses for me,"

interrupted Jack coldly, holding up a throbbing hand behind his back.

"See?" said Richard with a gesture of despair. "What could a fellow do? And I'll bet Winnie cooks fish so you never forget it."

"She's a good cook," Doctor Hugh conceded.

Richard sighed. He wished Rosemary felt more talkative. In his anxiety to entertain his guests, he stumbled on a sore subject.

"I used to go fishing pretty often myself," he said pleasantly. "The first year we were in college, Warren and I went off by ourselves nearly every Saturday afternoon. We made friends with the State wardens and they told us a lot of useful things. Once we saw them stock a stream—that was great. Ever see that, Jack?"

"No," snapped Jack, "and I'm not likely to; the only thing I'll know by the end of this summer will be how many cans of tomatoes the Goldenrod Canning Company has packed this year."

"How do they stock a stream?" asked Rosemary, her curiosity unloosening her tongue.

"Oh, they have thousands of baby fish and they ladle 'em out like so much fine gold," said Richard. "And we saw them net a pond once for carp—I wish I had more time to play around.

Perhaps when Warren and I get our own farm we can carry out a few ideas of ours."

"What's that you're going to do when you get your own farm, Richard?" asked Mrs. Hildreth, coming out on the porch, looking warm and tired. "I declare, every summer I say I'll have the baker stop here," she added. "I get so sick of baking my own bread when it's warm."

She did not sit down, but stood poised on the top step. Jack who had risen with the rest, kept one hand stiffly away from his body.

"What were you saying, Richard?" asked Mrs. Hildreth again.

"Oh, I was day-dreaming I guess," Richard answered. "I said that when Warren and I have our own farm, perhaps we'll have time to do some of the things we have always wanted to do."

Mrs. Hildreth mopped her flushed face with a handkerchief of generous size.

"Well, you won't," she prophesied. "I never knew anyone who lived on a farm to have a minute's time for anything but the hardest kind of work. Even in winter when the crops are in, there's wood to get out and cut and the animals to be fed and bedded down and the fires to look after and paths to be opened and the milking to

be done. It's one thing after another, all the year round."

Richard put one arm around the porch pillar.

"It could be different," he insisted. "For instance, you could buy bread—you just said so. That would save you some time."

"Which I should feel duty-bound to use in canning more fruit," countered Mrs. Hildreth promptly. "I'm not so keen on work, but the way I'm made, I feel guilty if I waste a half hour."

"It isn't wasting time to have a little enjoyment and leisure," Richard declared doggedly. "Is it, Jack?"

Jack a moment before had struck his hand against the porch railing, a light tap, scarcely to be noticed. But his face was white as he turned savagely on Richard.

"Work is the only thing that counts and you know it," he said fiercely. "The crops and the crops alone, are to be considered. If you kill yourself getting them in, that's a small matter; next year someone else will plant 'em again and perhaps kill himself, too."

"Dear me, Jack, maybe you have a little touch of the sun," said Mrs. Hildreth. "I think the doctor had better give you something to

make you sleep. You will, won't you, Doctor Willis?" the good woman urged anxiously.

"I'm all right," said Jack.

"Well, I'm sure I hope so," she returned in a voice that was far from sounding convinced. "Mr. Hildreth had a brother who had a sunstroke once and he wasn't right for years. Were you working in a blaze to-day, Jack?"

"He wore a hat," said Richard quickly, fearful that Jack's scant supply of patience would be utterly exhausted. "Besides, there was a breeze in the afternoon. It wasn't a bad day at all, Mrs. Hildreth."

"Don't you want to sit down, Mrs. Hildreth?" suggested Rosemary, wondering how anyone could remain standing so long, after being on her feet virtually all day.

"No, I'm going down the road in a minute," Mrs. Hildreth answered. "I want to ask Mrs. Tice about some new kind of rubber rings she got for her jars. How much fruit did Winnie put up so far, Rosemary?"

"Why—I don't believe I know," said Rosemary with a little laugh. "She made jelly, I remember and she's been canning nearly every week; but I don't know how many quarts or or pints she has. Do you, Hugh?"

"Never counted," acknowledged the doctor lazily. "I'll warrant Winnie can tell you right off the reel, Mrs. Hildreth. She's proud of her success—I heard her tell my mother so."

"I'll step over and look at her shelves some day," promised Mrs. Hildreth. "Dear me, I'm tired. But if I don't go to Bertha's now, I'll never get there. Tell Mr. Hildreth I'll be right back, if he asks you where I am."

She went heavily down the steps and disappeared across the lawn.

Richard dropped with an exaggerated thud.

"Another minute and my ankles would have given out!" he declared. "And she thinks it is work that tired her out."

"Well, it is," said Rosemary. "She works from five in the morning till nearly ten at night."

"But she could rest, if she only knew how," Richard protested.

"Ah, now you have it, Rich," said Doctor Hugh. "There's a great deal in knowing how to rest."

"There's no use in knowing how, when you can't rest if you want to," Jack complained bitterly.

"That isn't a very clear sentence, Jack," said the doctor. "Explain a little, won't you?"

"Oh, I'm tired," Jack declared ungraciously, "and there's nothing to explain, anyway."

The desultory conversation that followed was almost wholly between Rosemary and Richard. Jack was curiously silent and Doctor Hugh, too, seemed content to listen. Finally he rose.

"We must be getting back," he said. "First though, I'll take a look at your hand, Jack."

"There's nothing the matter with it," countered Jack gruffly.

"You act remarkably like Sarah," was Doctor Hugh's response to this. "Come in where I can have a light and don't be foolish."

Jack followed him sulkily and Rosemary and Richard watched while the doctor unwound the cloth that bound the injured finger. The cut was an angry-looking one.

"Needs attention," Doctor Hugh commented briefly. "Do you want to come up to the house with me, or shall I send Rosemary for the iodine bottle?"

Jack elected to remain where he was, and Rosemary sped away to get bandages and antiseptics. Mrs. Hildreth's tea kettle was requisitioned for a supply of hot water and then the doctor washed and dressed the cut, Jack enduring the process gamely.

"I won't knock off," he said defiantly as the last gauze fold was fastened in place. "I'm going to pick tomatoes, if I have to do it with my left hand."

"You can use your hand, if you'll keep the bandages in place," the doctor assured him. "I'll dress it again for you in the morning—and don't let me have to send for you. When you have had breakfast, come and get your hand attended to, before you go into the field."

"He'll feel better now," he said to Rosemary as they walked slowly down the road, extending their walk to enjoy the beauty of the summer evening. "His finger was throbbing and beginning to fester and must have given him great pain all day."

"Here comes Warren," whispered Rosemary.

Warren looked warm and tired. He stopped when he saw them and Rosemary would have walked on with a short "Hello!" had not her brother's hand upon her arm held her.

"You've been down to the bungalow?" said Warren, after he had thanked them for the fish and congratulated the fisherman on his luck. "I'm sorry I missed you."

"We went to see Jack," Rosemary informed him pointedly. "He's sick."

"Jack sick?" Warren looked surprised and, though she would not have admitted it, concerned.

"Not sick—but he has rather a nasty cut on one finger," corrected Doctor Hugh. "He'll be all right, if he follows directions."

Warren's eyes were troubled.

"I'm afraid he's having a tough time," he said regretfully. "I'm sorry, but—" he left the sentence unfinished.

The storm signals in Rosemary's expressive face were easily interpreted by her brother. He said good night to Warren and they resumed their walk.

"Why didn't you say something, Hugh!" burst out Rosemary, hardly waiting till they were beyond earshot. "Why didn't you tell him that Jack is our friend and that Warren needn't think he can treat him like that!"

"I don't know that Jack is being treated 'like that,'" protested Doctor Hugh whimsically. "You looked so like a thunder cloud, Rosemary, that there was nothing left to be said."

Rosemary jerked her arm free and faced him tempestuously.

"I believe you're taking Warren's part!" she accused him. "How can you? Anyway, I don't

care what you do—Jack Welles is my friend!"

"Jack is to be envied," said Doctor Hugh gently. "Though I wish, dear, that you would learn to reason a little more quietly. You know I am very fond of Jack—he is a splendid lad in many ways. So is Warren. This quarrel between them will blow over—why Rosemary, you and Jack have half a dozen quarrels a year and none of them are serious."

But the next day matters remained in much the same uncomfortable state. Jack reported obediently to have his finger dressed and refused —with more vigor than courtesy—Warren's offer to release him from picking for that day. Rosemary had a hot argument with Sarah, who perversely upheld Warren's cause, and then quarreled with her brother, who would not admit that Jack was a martyr.

"We won't discuss it any further, Rosemary," he said at last. "As far as I can judge, Warren is in the right and Jack is acting like a young and obstinate donkey."

The following afternoon Mrs. Willis went in to spend the night at the Eastshore house and choose the wall paper for the new suite of rooms. Doctor Hugh drove her in and was to drive her out the next morning. Jack had just finished

bedding down the horses that night, and was wondering whether he had the energy to dress and go up to the little white house, when he heard Rosemary's voice outside the barn.

"Jack! Jack, where are you?"

"Here!" Jack hurried into sight. "What's the matter?" he demanded when he saw her face.

"Sarah!" gasped Rosemary. "She didn't come in to supper and none of us have seen her the entire afternoon. Winnie wanted to telephone Hugh, but I am so afraid it will worry Mother."

"Don't telephone!" commanded Jack. "She's somewhere on the place and has forgotten to come in; let her get hungry and she'll turn up. But we'll go find her and remind her its after six o'clock."

Jack's cheerful matter-of-fact acceptance of Sarah's absence was the surest way to relieve the anxiety Winnie, as well as the girls, felt. At once they assured each other that Sarah was playing somewhere on the farm and had forgotten to come home. The discovery that Bony was also missing bore out Jack's theory; Sarah and the pig were having a beautiful time together.

Leaving Winnie and the two girls to search the barn and outbuildings, Jack hurried off to

get reinforcements. He thought of Warren as a tower of strength, cool, level-headed Warren who could manage any situation.

Warren and Richard had finished the last chore and were beginning to change, when Jack burst unceremoniously into their room.

"Warren!" he hurdled the wall of misunderstanding that had grown up between them in one agile leap. "Warren, they say Sarah Willis is lost. She didn't come home to supper. Mrs. Willis is in Eastshore with Hugh to-night and we have to find Sarah without letting her mother know."

Warren agreed that Rainbow Hill was to be searched from one end to the other. He and Richard and Jack went in different directions and Mr. Hildreth took a fourth. Winnie stayed at the house, in case the lost one returned, and Rosemary and Shirley went down to Miss Clinton's to ask if Sarah had perhaps been there that afternoon. She had not and when they came back Winnie put Shirley to bed for it was past her bed hour and she was tired and sleepy.

No trace of Sarah was found on the farm and no better luck was encountered at the Gay farm, whither Jack went, or at the two nearest neighbors, queried by Warren and Richard, cau-

tiously, lest the alarm spread and be relayed by the garrulous and unthinking to the little mother.

"Say, Warren," Jack stopped him as he was setting out again. "Old Belle isn't in her pasture."

"Old Belle!"

"And the light runabout and one set of single harness is gone—I looked."

"That kid couldn't harness without help and get off this place—don't tell me!" Warren's tone was half skeptical, half alarmed.

"Sarah can do anything you don't expect her to do," declared Jack. "Take it from me, that's what she has done this time. But how are we to find out the direction she took?"

"She'd go to Bennington," said Warren quickly. "If she had gone toward Eastshore someone who knew her would have been sure to spot her; besides, she is crazy about Bennington, always teasing to go with Hugh."

Old Belle was the oldest horse on the farm, a shambling, half-blind creature whose days of work had long been over. In summer she reveled in clover pasture, and the warmest box stall and choicest oats were hers in winter. Sarah had ridden her around the pasture a number of times, but it had never occurred to anyone that

she would attempt to drive her. Indeed the boys had not known that Sarah knew how to harness.

Three pairs of willing hands quickly backed "Tony," Mr. Hildreth's light driving horse, into the shafts of the buggy and, telling the anxious Winnie and Rosemary that they would have good news for them soon, they drove off toward Bennington, the county seat.

They said little, but they were more worried than they cared to admit. The highway was a state road and automobiles ran in both directions, two fairly steady streams. It was dark by now and the glare of the headlights might easily confuse an old, enfeebled horse and a little girl whose driving skill was of the slightest.

Warren drove and presently he pulled in the horse and gave the reins to Jack.

"I want to look at the road," he said, leaping lightly over the wheel and turning his pocket flash light full on the dusty macadam.

CHAPTER XXI

DOWN LINDEN ROAD

"WHAT is it?" asked Richard eagerly.

"Yes, what is it?" urged Jack.

Warren stooped and picked up something from the road.

"A horse shoe," he said briefly. "One of Belle's—hers were old and thin, you know, Rich. And over here—" he walked a few steps to a crossroad—"Sarah must have turned off. You can see the marks."

"Well," sheer relief spoke in Richard's voice, "that's one thing to be thankful for; if she turned off from the main road, she wouldn't meet many cars. But how far do you suppose she can have gone down the Linden road?"

Warren climbed back into the buggy and turned Tony's head down the Linden road.

"She hasn't gone far, not with Belle," he asserted confidently. "The old horse couldn't stand a long trip; I don't know whether there are any places for Sarah to drive in down here,

but I hope some kind farmer has her safely housed."

The Linden road was very dark and there was no moon to help out the two twinkling buggy lights. Suddenly Tony whinnied.

"Pull in, pull in!" cried Richard excitedly. "I think I see something!"

With a sharp "Whoa!" Warren brought the buggy to a standstill.

"Unscrew one of the lights," he directed Richard, at the same time jumping out and running to Tony's head with the rope and weight, a wise precaution for the horse might take fright easily in that strange place and start to run. "Come on, Jack."

They had to go only a few rods. Then the buggy lamp and the pocket flash showed them the runabout, with something dark and small curled up on the seat. The mare was down between the shafts and she raised her head inquiringly as the lights flashed into her patient eyes.

"Sarah—asleep!" whispered Jack. "And the pig, too!"

"Belle fell down and Sarah couldn't get her up," said Warren, realizing at once what had occurred. "The poor kid—she must have been frightened stiff."

Jack pulled himself up on the runabout step and leaned over Sarah. The tears were not dry on her cheeks and as he looked she opened her dark eyes with a little cry.

"You're all right, Sarah," he said soothingly. "Warren and Richard and I have come to take you home."

To his astonishment, Sarah, who hated demonstration of any kind, threw her arms about his neck and burrowed her face on his shoulder. Bony rolled protestingly to the floor and squeaked sharply as he hit the dashboard in his descent.

"The horse fell down," sobbed Sarah, "and she wouldn't get up. And it got darker and darker and there weren't any houses anywhere. Is Belle dead, Jack?"

"Not a bit of it," said Jack stoutly. "She was tired, because she is an old horse and isn't used to traveling far."

"Now that she is rested, we'll have no trouble getting her home," put in Warren. "You stay where you are, Sarah, till we get her up."

But Sarah had had enough of the runabout and she insisted on climbing down while the boys got Belle to her feet and went over the harness.

"It's a wonder it didn't slide off her," declared

Warren as he cinched belts and snapped unfastened buckles. "I'll give you a lesson in harnessing some day, Sarah, for you still have a few points to learn."

It was an odd procession that drove into Rainbow Hill lane an hour later. They dared not hurry the old horse and Sarah flatly refused to be taken home in the buggy with Tony, leaving Belle and the runabout to be driven in at a slower pace. Jack would have bundled her off unceremoniously but Warren, while admitting that she had "made enough trouble and ought to consider the feelings of other people once in a while" would not force the issue.

"She's dead tired and she's been badly frightened," he said quietly. "After all, it will mean a difference of not more than half an hour. We'll wait for old Belle."

So Jack and Richard, driving the runabout and the old mare, set the pace and Sarah and Bony in the buggy with Warren followed behind Tony.

Rosemary and Winnie and the Hildreths came running out to greet the prodigal, who had to be awakened to answer their eager questions —and Winnie bore Sarah off to bed while Rosemary flew to the kitchen and began making

sandwiches to serve with the ginger ale she knew was in the ice box. Excitement has a way of making people hungry and the boys especially were appreciative of the refreshments.

Doctor Hugh read his small sister a severe lecture the next morning when, upon his return with his mother, he heard the story, and extracted her promise that hereafter she would not leave the farm without explicit permission. A subdued Sarah made a shamefaced apology to Mr. Hildreth for taking his horse and runabout and for as much as three days she slipped about like a meek little shadow.

"Jack told me you found the horse shoe, Warren," said Rosemary, meeting Warren that next morning as he came from the creamery. "So you really found Sarah for us—and I think you are very quick and clever."

"Any one of us would have found her," declared Warren lightly. "You can't really lose a little girl and a horse—you're bound to fall over them sometime, sooner or later."

"Sarah might have had to spend the night on that lonely road," insisted Rosemary. "Hugh says so, too. And Mother thinks just as we do."

She turned, with a little determined nod of her pretty head.

"Rosemary!" Warren's voice halted her.

He made no motion to drive on to the barn, but sat in the wagon, holding the reins, and looking at her steadily.

"You're not angry with me now?" he said.

Rosemary was perplexed.

"Of course not."

"But you were a night or two ago—when I met you and Doctor Hugh?"

The tell-tale color rose under Rosemary's smooth skin.

"Well—" she hesitated. "Perhaps I was then—just a little. But I get mad so easily, Warren, it doesn't count."

"I'd prefer," said Warren composedly, "to always be good friends with you."

The impulsive Rosemary took a step forward that brought her close to the wagon.

"We *are* friends," she assured Warren eagerly. Then, mischief welling up in her blue eyes, "When you've known me a little longer you'll find out that I often quarrel with my friends."

"I don't," said Warren soberly, but he drove away to the barn whistling merrily.

The few days remaining of Doctor Hugh's vacation and Jack's agreement with Mr. Hildreth, passed quickly and pleasantly. The three

boys worked together in perfect harmony and Jack began to enjoy a sense of power and ease that came with the hardening of his muscles. The sun might be hot, but the rays no longer made him uncomfortable—the rows of vines were as long as ever, but he swung down them easily and picked the ripe tomatoes almost automatically.

"I don't see why you don't finish out the month," Mr. Hildreth said to him the night before his two weeks were over. "I'd like to have you first rate and it seems a pity to leave just when you're broke in."

Somewhat to his surprise, Jack heard himself agreeing to stay. Warren and Richard heartily applauded his decision and Doctor Hugh agreed to carry back an approved report to Mrs. Welles.

"It will do you good, in many ways, Jack," said the doctor seriously. "And if you are going to try for the football team this fall, you'll be in the pink of condition."

The next day Doctor Hugh went back to resume his regular schedule though, he promised his disconsolate family, he would try to spend the week-ends, or Sundays at least, with them.

"But I hope you realize that the summer is

almost over," he told Rosemary who was riding with him down to the cross-roads where she expected to get out and walk back. "School opens next month and we must be safely moved back to Eastshore before that important day. You have not more than four weeks left to spend at Rainbow Hill, young lady."

"I'll go over and see Louisa," said Rosemary to herself, as she reached the back road that led to the Gay farm, after leaving her brother. "Mother won't expect me back till lunch time, for I told her I might stop in and see Miss Clinton. But I've seen Louisa only once since Hugh came."

The Gay farm looked more dilapidated than ever to Rosemary's eyes and the little attempt at a flower bed, in the center of the long, dried grass before the house, only made the general effect more hopeless.

Rosemary walked around to the back door and knocked. Louisa answered, carrying June in her arms.

"I thought maybe you'd gone back to Eastshore," said Louisa dully, "but Sarah and Shirley said no, your brother was visiting for his vacation."

"Yes, Hugh did come," answered Rosemary

honestly, "and we went somewhere with him nearly every day, if only over the farm. I would have liked to bring him to see you and Alec, but I was afraid—I thought—"

"Mercy, I'm glad you didn't!" the idea seemed enough to frighten Louisa. "I wouldn't want a stranger coming here."

"Louisa, do you know Miss Clinton?" asked Rosemary suddenly. "She lives all by herself and she is so lonesome."

She had a hazy thought of suggesting that Louisa might be willing to go and see Miss Clinton—Louisa needed friends as badly as the little wheel-chair woman did—but the girl's answer was not encouraging.

"She lives in that little yellow house," said Louisa. "She may be lonely, but she has enough money to live on and no one need be pitied who can keep out of debt."

"Oh, Louisa!" Rosemary drew nearer in concern. "Haven't you the money for the interest?"

"Not a cent," said Louisa bitterly. "The little we did have saved toward it, we had to spend on a pump. The old one gave out and you can't get along without water, no matter what else you can do without."

Rosemary glanced toward the shining new pump—so obviously new and shiny that it made everything else in the kitchen look shabbier by contrast.

"There ought to be *some* way to get money when you need it," she said earnestly.

"There isn't," Louisa informed her. "Don't you suppose I've thought and thought? No matter how much you need it, there isn't any money to get—and if there was, you wouldn't need it because it would be there to get," and Louisa laughed rather hysterically.

"That may not make good sense," she added, "but I can't help that; it is true."

CHAPTER XXII

SARAH HAS AN IDEA

ROSEMARY walked home slowly. Louisa, worn out by worry and work, had yielded to the luxury of a good cry and though, when she had wiped her eyes, she declared she felt much better and more cheerful than for a week, Rosemary was not convinced.

A glimpse of Alec, thin and brown, with the same worried look in his nice clear eyes, had not helped to convince her. It was plain that both Louisa and Alec were expecting the foreclosure of the mortgage on the farm and anticipating the separation of the family.

"I couldn't stand it," said Rosemary earnestly to a chipmunk, who shook his head in sympathy. "I couldn't stand it, if Sarah and Shirley and I had to go live in different houses. Suppose we didn't have Mother and Hugh and Winnie!"

The realization of her own blessings only emphasized the hard position of the Gays without

a father or mother. By the time she had come to the Rainbow Hill orchard, Rosemary was feeling very blue indeed.

"Come on up!" two sweet little voices called to her. "Come on up, Rosemary!"

Rosemary peered at the trees, and giggles floating from one gnarled old apple tree revealed where Sarah and Shirley were hidden.

"What's the matter?" asked Shirley instantly, when Rosemary had swung herself up to a seat beside them.

"I've been to see Louisa Gay," explained Rosemary, "and they haven't a cent of money for the interest on that awful mortgage. It's due the first of September and Louisa says the man will take the farm and they'll all be on the town!"

"I thought you had to go and live in the poor house, if folks took your farm," objected Sarah.

"It's all the same," said Rosemary impatiently. "Louisa says so. When you're 'on the town' that means the town supports you and you live at the poor farm. Girls, we just have to get some money for the Gays!"

"Ask Hugh," suggested Shirley, as her favorite way out of money difficulties.

"We can't," Rosemary told her. "Louisa and

Alec don't like strangers and Hugh is a stranger to them. We mustn't even tell grown-up people about them, because if they know the Gays are poor, they'll come and take them to the poor farm, anyway. Alec says they don't even go to the Center any more because he doesn't want people to ask him questions."

When Winnie rang the bell to signal that lunch was ready, the three girls had not succeeded in forming any definite plan to help the Gays. They had made up their minds that money must be obtained, but the way was anything but clear.

"You see," said Rosemary, taking up the question again after lunch, "we can't ask Warren or Richard for any money. They are saving all they earn to get them through agricultural college and Hugh told me they have to do some work in the winter to get enough. Jack never has any money of his own—he will have some at the end of the month, but he's set his heart on buying his mother something lovely with the first money he has ever really earned. There doesn't seem to be anybody to help Louisa and Alec, except us."

"And we haven't a cent, except the five-dollar gold pieces Aunt Trudy sent us Fourth of July," said Sarah practically.

"We must think," declared Rosemary solemnly. "You think *hard*, Sarah, and you, too, Shirley. And I'll think with all my might."

Such concentration of thought should have produced some result, but the next morning each had failure to report. Then Richard announced that Solomon must be shod and offered to take anyone over who felt free to spend the morning in Bennington.

"I have to make up my lost practising," said Rosemary, "and Hugh is going to take Mother and Shirley with him—he telephoned he'd stop for them. Sarah would like to go—she was wailing that everyone went to places and left her home."

Sarah climbed happily into her place by Richard and they drove off to Bennington, at a slower pace than usual for Richard wished to "favor" the shoeless foot.

"Oh, look!" the rather silent Sarah kindled into animation at the sight of a gay-colored poster tacked to a telegraph pole along the road. "What's that, Richard?"

"Circus!" he answered smilingly. "Coming next month. See the lions, Sarah? How would you like one of those to play with, eh?"

He obligingly pulled in the willing Solomon,

and Sarah studied the poster with intent, serious dark eyes. Driving on, Richard found her curiously self-absorbed. She answered him in monosyllables and was apparently deep in a brown study.

"A penny for your thoughts?" he offered, wondering what she could be pondering over.

But Sarah refused to sell and continued to be silent.

Richard would have been surprised indeed, could he have seen what was going on in that active little brain. The circus poster had shown Sarah, besides the wonderful lions, a marvelous performing bear, dancing on his hind legs. A crowd of people laughed at him and applauded.

"Bony can do that!" Sarah had thought with pride, and then, like a flash, followed the thought: "I could sell Bony to the circus and give the money to Louisa!"

The rest of the way to Bennington was occupied, as far as Sarah was concerned, in selling Bony to the owner of the bear, who promised to give the pig a kind home and explain to him frequently why his mistress had consented to let him leave Rainbow Hill.

Sarah had reached the moment when she put her precious pig into the bear man's hands (she

innocently assumed that he must have charge of all the circus animals) just as Richard drew up before the blacksmith's shop.

"You don't want to hang around here," said Richard authoritatively, lifting her down from the seat. "I'll have to give some orders about shoeing Solomon and you wait for me on the side porch of the hotel. I won't be long."

He led Sarah unprotestingly—though at any other time she would have teased to be allowed to stay and watch the fascinating work of the smithy—across the street and to the steep little flight of steps that led to the pleasant, vine-covered side porch of the country hotel.

"Good morning, Mrs. King," he said, lifting his hat as a gray-haired woman peered over the railing at them. "This is Sarah Willis—I want to have her wait here while I'm over at the shop."

"She'll be all right," answered Mrs. King kindly. "She can sit here and rest; it's nice and shady."

Mrs. King was shelling peas, and Sarah sat down in the cretonne-covered rocking chair next to her. There was one other person on the porch —a stout gentleman, stretched out in an arm chair, sound asleep. His face was covered with a white silk handkerchief which partially hid his round, bald head.

"Do you like the country?" asked Mrs. King, glancing toward her small visitor while her clever, quick fingers sent a continuous shower of peas rattling into the pan in her lap.

"Oh, yes, I like it," nodded Sarah with enthusiasm. "I like it lots better than Eastshore and going to school. I wouldn't mind living in the country for always."

"But you'd have to go to school if you lived in the country," said Mrs. King mildly. "You can't get away from lesson-books, no matter where you go."

"Not in Africa?" suggested Sarah who never disdained an argument.

"I've never been in Africa," Mrs. King replied, "so I can't tell you positively. But my guess is all the children who aren't natives, have to be educated."

"What do the children who are natives do?" asked Sarah.

Mrs. King considered.

"I imagine they go around without any clothes on and the tigers eat them," she decided, recalling to mind several doleful pictures she had seen in an old geography.

Sarah shivered, not in sympathy with the

scantily clad children, but because of the tigers mentioned.

"I wouldn't want to be eaten by a tiger," she declared, rocking violently back and forth, "but I would love to have a baby tiger to play with me."

"Look out you don't go over backward," warned the landlady. "Don't you know a baby tiger would grow up to be a fierce, wild animal and probably end up by eating you?" she added.

"He wouldn't eat me, if I brought him up tame," said Sarah. "Baby tigers are like kittens —I saw some pictures of them once. I'd keep mine to guard my farm and I'll bet no robbers would come if they knew a live tiger was roaming around."

"No, robbers wouldn't come, or your friends, either," Mrs. King said grimly. "And the butcher would be afraid to turn up, for fear the tiger might think he was the meat ordered for his dinner. You and your tiger would get lonely after a while."

"I have a tiger cat home," volunteered Sarah. "But she isn't very exciting. I like big animals. Maybe a baby elephant would be more fun."

"Than a tiger?" said Mrs. King, pausing to

admire a freshly opened pod in her hand. "Seven perfect peas," she murmured.

"Yes, I could use a baby elephant," Sarah informed her. "They are very strong. I have an animal book that tells all about them. Even baby elephants are strong. I saw a picture of one pulling a tree over."

"My land, a farm won't be big enough for you," commented Mrs. King. "What you ought to do is to go out West and start a place in the middle of the desert. But the snakes would probably send you back home before long."

She was quite unprepared for Sarah's cry of rapture.

"Snakes!" repeated that small girl in a voice of ecstasy. "Are there snakes in the desert?"

Mrs. King shook her pan vigorously in the effort to find a stray pod that had slipped through her fingers.

"I've heard that the place is full of snakes," she answered. "Man or beast isn't safe from them. Rattlesnakes and all kinds—sometimes, I've heard folks say, if the nights are the least bit chilly, the rattlers crawl under the blankets to get warm. Imagine waking up in the morning and finding a snake in bed with you!"

"He wouldn't hurt you, if you didn't provoke him," Sarah asserted. "Snakes are polite and they'll let you alone if you let them do as they please. I think snakes are the most interesting things to see!"

"I don't!" said Mrs. King. "I'd run a mile before I'd face one. There is nothing, to my mind, more disgusting than a wriggling snake."

Sarah looked grieved.

"That's the same way my Aunt Trudy talks," she observed. "She is scared to death of little, tiny snakes. Even water snakes. And a water snake never hurts anyone."

"Don't show me one," said Mrs. King hurriedly. "I don't care what kind of a snake it is, they're all alike as long as they can move. I never want to see one on the place."

Sarah wisely concluded that another topic would be welcome and unconsciously the huge gray cat that climbed over the porch railing and leaped heavily to the floor, provided it.

"What a darling cat!" cried Sarah, abandoning her chair in such haste that it narrowly missed falling backward. "Is it yours, Mrs. King?"

"Yes, he's mine," said the landlady. "He used to be a right handsome cat but lately he's

getting too fat. The girls in the kitchen feed him all the time. I don't believe he has caught a mouse or a rat for six weeks."

"He wouldn't catch mice," Sarah declared feelingly. "Would you, darling? He's too nice for that," and she sat down in the cretonne-covered rocker again, holding the cat in her arms.

"No cat is worth his board, to my way of thinking, who *doesn't* catch mice and rats," retorted Mrs. King. "Garry used to be a famous mouser."

"I guess the poor mice want to live," Sarah protested, stroking the thick fur of the purring cat with a practised hand.

"It's a question of human beings living, or the mice," declared Mrs. King. "Of course if you want the mice to move into your house and you move out, that's another matter. Till I get ready to do that, I'm going to set traps in the pantry every night and leave Garry shut up in the kitchen."

"Just like Winnie," murmured the hapless Sarah.

"Seems to me you ought to run a zoo," said Mrs. King glancing curiously over her spectacles at the small girl rocking the fat cat. "Though how you're going to keep the mice and

the cats and the snakes and the tigers all happy and contented together, is more than I'm able to figure out."

"I could make 'em love each other," said Sarah confidently.

"I don't know about that," argued Mrs. King. "Even in the circus they can't bring that about. Mr. Robinson would tell you that," and she pointed to the stout man who was still asleep in his chair.

"Who's that?" whispered Sarah, wondering why anyone should want to sleep with a handkerchief over his face.

"That's Mr. Robinson, dearie," replied Mrs. King, her swift fingers never pausing in their work. "He's advance agent for the circus."

Sarah sat up with a jerk.

"Does he own the circus?" she asked eagerly.

"Bless you, no," said Mrs. King smiling, "he doesn't own it, though he has a good deal to do with it, in one way or another. He comes every year to see that the posters are put up and to arrange for space for the tents and some extra help, if it's needed. He goes around to all the towns, ahead of the circus, you see, and tells folks it is coming; and in the winter he does considerable buying of animals and whatnot and hiring of performers, they tell me."

Sarah stared at the silk handkerchief in spellbound fascination. One more question struggled for utterance.

"What is whatnot?" she demanded, her eyes still on the fat man asleep in his chair.

"Whatnot?"—Mrs. King was puzzled.

"You said he bought whatnot for the circus."

"My land alive, didn't you ever hear of whatnot? It doesn't mean a thing—it's just a phrase," poor Mrs. King protested. "I meant Mr. Robinson buys little tricks and novelties and small side-show stuff like that."

Sarah nodded absently, though she had no very clear idea of the good lady's meaning even then. When Mrs. King went away presently, murmuring that it was time to put the peas on to cook, Sarah sat quietly in her chair, her gaze riveted to the silk handkerchief.

Suddenly, as she watched, a large and noisy fly also discovered the handkerchief. He decided to investigate, experience probably having taught him that handkerchiefs may be used to conceal a set of sensitive features.

Cautiously he alighted and began to crawl—swat! the stout gentleman slapped sleepily, narrowly missing the tormentor.

Up rose Sarah and bore down upon the scene.

"Don't swat him!" she begged. "He won't

hurt you—flies only tickle. Anyway, if you'd use a palm leaf fan, no flies would ever bother you."

The circus agent snatched the handkerchief from his face and sat up in astonishment, revealing a very kindly, very good-humored face fringed with white hair and lighted by a pair of twinkling eyes.

"Bless me!" he cried when he saw the determined small girl. "What's all this?"

"The fly!" explained Sarah seriously. "You tried to kill him. And he doesn't even bite."

"Well, I may have been hasty," apologized Mr. Robinson, his eyes twinkling more than ever. "I don't always think when I am half asleep."

Sarah's mind was already running on what she wanted to say to him. She was more direct by nature than tactful as her next remark showed.

"You're a circus man, aren't you?" she said, making it more a statement of fact than a question.

"I'm advance agent, yes," Mr Robinson admitted.

He was totally unprepared for the next query.

"Then," said Sarah gravely, "wouldn't you like to buy a very fine pig?"

CHAPTER XXIII

BONY JOINS THE CIRCUS

MR. ROBINSON, recovered from his first surprise, proved to be an excellent listener. Sarah told him of Bony and that animal's accomplishments and he admitted that his circus did not have a trained pig. He was interested, too, to hear how she had taught the pig these tricks and Sarah, quite carried away by this flattering evidence of understanding, told him a great deal more. In fact, unconsciously, she presented him a picture of the family at Rainbow Hill and, before she had finished, of the Gay family, too. This last, to do her justice, was quite unintentional.

"I didn't mean to tell you about the Gays," she cried in quick remorse. "Rosemary said we must never tell a stranger about them; when a grown-up person knows how poor they are, the town will take them to the poor farm."

"Now don't you be sorry," Mr. Robinson comforted her. "Don't you be sorry for one

thing you've told me. I won't let it go any further—least ways not among the town folk. I'm glad you told me about this family, downright glad. I've known what it is to live on a farm with a mortgage hanging over your head."

"Have you?" asked Sarah humbly, much relieved. "Then maybe Louisa won't care if you do know about their mortgage."

"I've been thinking," said Mr. Robinson slowly, "that it would be a good thing if I went with you this morning and saw the pig you've told me about; mind you, I can't promise to buy it, till I've seen it. But I'd like to look at it. And I'd like to see this Gay farm—maybe that will turn out to be something I can use."

Sarah did not see how he could use a farm in a circus, but she wisely refrained from asking. Richard returning for her at this juncture, she introduced him to the circus agent and explained that he wanted to go back to Rainbow Hill with them.

Richard was surprised, but cordial, and as Solomon, brave in a new shoe and three tightened old ones, trotted them homeward, Sarah and Mr. Robinson together explained their plans.

Sarah's was comparatively simple. She

wanted to sell Bony to the circus and give the money to Louisa. The pig was the most valuable possession she owned and would surely bring more money than anything else she might part with—even her five-dollar gold piece. Yes, she admitted, in response to Richard's questioning, she was fond of Bony—but she thought he would like living with a circus.

Mr. Robinson's plan was more complicated.

"For some time past," he said to Richard, a little breathlessly, for he was stout and the wagon jolted him considerably, "for some time past, I've been on the lookout for new winter quarters for the circus. My idea has been to get a farm in a good section of the country, but of course we can't afford to pay a price a place in a good state of cultivation would bring; what we want is acreage and buildings in fair shape. This Gay farm the little girl tells me about, may fill the bill, providing they are willing to sell."

"They would sell, all right," Richard declared thoughtfully, "but I don't see where they can go. The place won't bring enough to keep a family of six very long."

"We can talk that over, after I see the place," said Mr. Robinson. "You can trust me to be fair to a parcel of kids—I lived on a farm and I was bound out on a farm."

Eager as Sarah was to exhibit her pig, she had to wait. It was "dinner time" at the farmhouse and lunch time for the Willis family when Richard stopped before the barn. Mrs. Willis and Shirley had returned—Doctor Hugh had dropped them at the crossroads and gone on to the hospital in Bennington—and while at the table Sarah made no mention of her plans. She had a habit of taking no part in the general conversation, unless personally interested, and her silence created no wonderment.

After the hospitable manner of the countryside, the circus agent was asked to dinner by Mr. Hildreth who took it for granted that he had asked a lift of Richard on his way from one town to another. And, the meal over, Richard piloted him to the barn, where Rosemary and Shirley and Sarah and the pig awaited him.

"Come on and watch," said Sarah cordially, but Richard, declaring he was too busy, went on to his work.

Sarah was a little fearful lest Bony develop "temperament," of which he had his share, and refuse to act, but he happened to be in the best of humors, thanks to a peaceful morning free from interruptions, which had allowed him to enjoy a full-length nap.

Sarah put him through his paces and change of costumes with pride. He danced, he marched, he went through his acrobatics; he wheeled the doll carriage and poured afternoon tea; he played the piano and read, wearing a pair of glassless spectacles and turning the printed page with a graceful air of interest. He grunted "Yes" and he squeaked "No" to half a dozen questions. And finally, seated in a doll's rocking chair, he fanned himself as though the exactions of his art were wearing in the extreme.

"I ought to sign *you* up with the circus," said Mr. Robinson admiringly, when Sarah announced that Bony had displayed the extent of his accomplishments. "You must have a gift, to be able to train an animal like that. Of course he is a clever pig, but you have developed him and made it easy for us to teach him fancier tricks. Do you want to sell him?"

Sarah looked at Rosemary, who, with Shirley, had come out to witness the performance.

"Yes," said Sarah, after a minute. "Yes, I want to sell him."

"You can't change your mind, you know," announced the circus agent warningly. He wanted the pig but he wished to be fair.

Sarah's chin went up in the air.

"I won't change my mind," she declared. "I won't sell Bony and then ask for him back. You may have him—now."

"Can't take him till to-morrow morning," said Mr. Robinson. "Don't you have to ask any older person—your mother, for instance?"

Rosemary shook her head.

"Mr. Hildreth gave the pig to Sarah," she explained. "It is all hers. And you mustn't tell anyone about buying it—that is, that the money is for Louisa."

Mr. Robinson looked perplexed, as well he might.

"But little grasshoppers!" he ejaculated, scratching his head. "You can go just so far with a secret, you know; if I buy this Gay farm a heap of people will have to know about it."

"Oh, who?" said Rosemary in quick distress.

"Well, the guardian, or whoever holds the estate for them," said Mr. Robinson. "Then the lawyer who draws the deed and all the folks at the Court House who have anything to do with the searches and like that."

"I don't understand," declared Rosemary, while Sarah and Shirley began to fold up the dresses Bony had worn. "But I am sure there

is no guardian. Louisa would have said something about it."

"Never mind," said the circus agent kindly. "Plenty of time to find out all that later. Now if the little girl really wants to sell the pig—"

He named a figure that surprised them all. Whether, as Doctor Hugh suspected when he heard the story, Mr. Robinson wanted to help the Gays too, and added more as a practical way to assist them; or whether, as Sarah was firmly convinced, Bony was the smartest pig he had ever seen and he recognized his value, does not really matter. There, before three pairs of wondering eyes, he counted out a little heap of soiled bills and gave them to Sarah.

"I'll take the pig in the morning," he said, folding up the remainder of his money and fastening the roll with an elastic. "I expect to put up with the Hildreths to-night and one of the boys will take me back to town after breakfast. You look after the pig for me till then, won't you?"

Sarah promised and then, as she did not seem to know what to do with the money, he suggested that she run into the house and give it to her mother to put away.

The three girls were anxious to go over to the

Gay farm with Mr. Robinson, but he explained that he thought he could talk better to Alec and Louisa alone.

"I'm just going to wander over there and tell 'em that Richard Gilbert sent me," he said. "I'll say he heard I wanted to buy a small place and that I thought they might be in the market. I'll tell you all about it, soon as I get back."

They watched him start "across lots" to the Gay farm and then Sarah went into the house to ask her mother to put away the money.

"You've sold Bony, dear?" echoed Mrs. Willis when she heard the news. "And for all this money? Who bought him, Sarah? When did you sell your pig?"

Sarah told her about Mr. Robinson, and Rosemary and Shirley listened eagerly for they had not heard the details, nor learned how Sarah had met the circus agent.

"I always said Bony was a smart pig!" wound up Sarah, watching her mother counting the money into a little black tin box, fitted with a lock and key.

"But Sarah dear, I thought you were very fond of Bony," said Mrs. Willis. "Why did you want to sell him—and what are you planning to do with all this money?"

"It's a secret," declared Sarah, setting her lips tightly.

"Oh, lamb! Don't you want to tell Mother?"

Sarah shook her head so violently her black hair whipped across her eyes.

"Nobody must ever tell—never, never, never!" she asserted and, catching Shirley by the hand, she ran out of the room, dragging her small sister with her.

Rosemary's beautiful blue eyes turned to her mother's troubled ones.

"It's all right, Mother," she urged. "Really it is; the man wanted to buy the pig—he told Rich it was very cleverly trained. And what Sarah wants to do with the money won't be a secret after the first of September. She'll tell you then."

"I'll have to hold it for her until she does tell me," said Mrs. Willis quietly. "I don't see how Sarah could bring herself to part with Bony, Rosemary; she has been devoted to him."

Rosemary wanted to tell of the motive that had prompted Sarah's sacrifice, but thought she was in honor bound not to. So she went downstairs to her practising, wondering what Louisa and Alec were saying to Mr. Robinson and whether he would buy the farm from them.

Sarah and her pig disappeared till dinner time and if during the meal the former seemed more silent than usual it might easily have been because she was tired.

Mrs. Hildreth came for one of her rare chats with Mrs. Willis after dinner that night and then the girls felt free to slip down to the bungalow to hear what Mr. Robinson had to tell them.

Eager as they were to learn what had been done for the Gays, they were not to go directly to the bungalow for half way across the lawn Mrs. Hildreth called to them.

"Miss Clinton sent me word to-day, Rosemary," she said, "that she'd like very much to see you; the letter-man told me. I thought maybe you'd go down there this evening."

"Don't go," whispered Sarah. "We want to see Mr. Robinson."

Rosemary stopped uncertainly. It was still light and Mrs. Willis would not object if they were back before dark.

"We were going to see the boys," said Rosemary. "There was something I wanted to ask them—"

"Oh, you can see them when you come back," Mrs. Hildreth answered. "I'd go see Miss Clinton if I were you; she gets lonely and it

isn't very nice to disappoint an old lady. She hasn't so many interests as you have."

Rosemary looked at the speaker a trifle resentfully. Mrs. Hildreth, like many busy people, was an adept at pointing out duties for other folk.

"Shall we go, Mother?" she asked doubtfully.

Now Mrs. Willis knew nothing of Mr. Robinson's all important visit to the Gay farm and she saw no special reason for a visit to the bungalow.

"Why I don't see why not, darling," she answered. "If you are not too tired. Don't stay long, because you want to be home before dark. As Mrs. Hildreth says, the old lady is probably lonely."

Rosemary went on and Sarah began to scold.

"I don't see why you said you'd go," she complained. "We never plan to go anywhere that someone doesn't spoil it. Why didn't you say you'd go when you got ready and not before?"

"Because that would have been disrespectful and rude and you know it," retorted Rosemary tartly. "You and Shirley go on and see Mr. Robinson and I'll see Miss Clinton. I don't mind going alone."

"I'll go, too," said Shirley.

"I'm not going to hear what he has to say and let you wait," announced Sarah gruffly. "What do you suppose Miss Clinton wants?"

"Company, probably," said Rosemary. "We'll tell her we can't stay long, because Mother doesn't like us out after dark; we can stop at the bungalow on the way back and the boys will walk back with us."

They found Miss Clinton, sitting in her chair, in the center of the doorway. Then they were glad they had come, for it was easy to picture her sitting like that a whole dreary evening, watching and waiting.

"I hoped you'd come this evening," the old lady greeted them. "Is that Sarah with you? My, my, I don't often have you for a visitor, my dear."

Sarah looked pleased. She appreciated cordial welcome as much as anyone.

"I told the letter-man to tell Mrs. Hildreth I wanted to see you, Rosemary," went on Miss Clinton, "because I have a letter I can't read and I don't want to trust it to anyone around here. They are such gossips!" she added a little harshly.

"But can I read it?" asked Rosemary, surprised. "I mean will I be able to?"

"Oh, it's written in English, all right," laughed the old lady, her bright bird-like eyes twinkling. "I'm not asking you to translate a French or Spanish letter. I don't believe it will take you very long, because you are bright."

"We mustn't stay till dark," murmured Rosemary, wondering what kind of a letter it could be that Miss Clinton was unable to decipher.

"You'll have it done long before dark," Miss Clinton assured her. "Let me see, where did I put it? Oh yes—look in that jar on the cabinet shelf."

Rosemary lifted the lid of the Canton ginger jar. It was apparently empty but feeling around in it, her fingers found some scraps of paper.

"That's the letter," said the old lady placidly. "I put it down on a pile of old papers this morning when it first came and then when I went to start a fire this noon, I carelessly tore the papers across and with them the letter. Fortunately I discovered what I had done in time to save the scraps, but I can't put them together again. I thought you could."

Rosemary emptied out the pieces of paper on the table and, instructed by Miss Clinton, found

the paste and a large sheet of paper on which to paste the bits. Shirley and Sarah sat down on the floor and began playing with the toys in the cabinet.

"Adelaide has real good sense," remarked Miss Clinton as Rosemary studied the pieces attentively, "she never writes on more than one side of the paper. I'd be in a pretty fix, if she had."

Rosemary privately thought that she was in a fix as it was, for the scrawled writing made no sense whatever, as far as she could see. She arranged it tentatively, scattered the pieces again and laboriously pieced them together in another combination.

"Did it begin, 'Dear Aunt'?" she asked desperately.

"Mercy no." Miss Clinton looked up brightly from her crocheting. "Adelaide calls me 'Clintie' and always has. Usually she begins, 'Clintie dear.' "

Rosemary worked feverishly, anxious to please the old lady and even more anxious to be on her way. She wanted to know what the circus agent had done about the farm and she was curious to know if Louisa was displeased that their straits had become known to a stranger.

"There!" she said, after almost an hour's work. "I think I have it all right—it makes sense, anyway. But there's a corner missing."

"I don't mind a corner, as long as you have the gist of it," returned Miss Clinton gratefully. "I didn't want to write to Adelaide that I'd destroyed her letter before I'd even read it. I'm sure I don't know how to thank you, Rosemary!"

She wanted the girls to stay and have some of her sponge cake—baked that afternoon—but they were in a fever of impatience to be gone. When they finally found themselves out in the lane that took them to the Hildreth house, Sarah was the first to speak.

"If she'd had a telephone we could have asked her what she wanted and then we wouldn't have gone," she declared.

"Yes we would," smiled Rosemary. "That wasn't much to do—or it wouldn't have been, if we weren't going to hear about the Gays. Miss Clinton didn't know that."

"I see Mr. Robinson!" chirped Shirley as they came in sight of the house.

CHAPTER XXIV

TRULY A SACRIFICE

"DID you buy the farm?" asked Sarah bluntly.

Richard and Warren and Jack and the circus agent sat on the top step and below them were ranged Rosemary, Shirley and Sarah. Mr. Hildreth had considerately gone into the kitchen to read.

"No," answered Mr. Robinson, "I didn't buy the place."

Three faces fell.

"But I've rented it," he went on, "and paid a quarter's rent in advance."

"Is that just as good?" inquired Rosemary respectfully.

Mr. Robinson laughed and Warren nodded.

"Alec was over at milking time and he was feeling as gay as his name," said Warren. "I guess their troubles are over for a time."

Then Mr. Robinson explained what he had done and why and never did a speaker have a more attentive audience.

"I won't bother you with the legal end of it," he said good-naturedly, "but these children are under twenty-one and when their parents died a guardian should have been appointed for them. If I tried to buy the farm there would have to be a guardian appointed and even then I doubt if he could give me a clear title.

"So, for many reasons, it is much simpler to rent the farm from them and better, I am firmly convinced, for the children. They are to stay on in the house and this winter I and my wife will come out and make our headquarters there. Alec can lend me a hand with the animals and Mother will see that that plucky girl gets her schooling. I'll stable most of the circus horses out here and as nearly as I can tell it's just the kind of a place we need."

He told them a great deal more about Alec's surprise and Louisa's delight and something of the plans for the winter which should include the attendance at school of the five Gays old enough to go.

The boys walked back with Rosemary and Shirley and Sarah, and Warren told them further details.

"Mr. Robinson is a brick!" he declared heartily. "He's renting the farm because he discovered

in what desperate straits the Gays are; if he tried to buy it, it would take months to get their affairs untangled—there would be miles of red tape and court hearings and dear knows what all. Instead he has paid them cash down for a quarter and I understand from Alec he is paying a generous rental, besides offering Alec employment this winter. He's put out because the town hasn't done anything—and now, he says, he and his wife will look after them and Bennington can save its legal snail tracks."

"But Alec and Louisa didn't want the town to know anything about them," protested Rosemary.

"Well, they're too young to manage their own affairs," said Warren curtly. "Somebody should have been responsible long before this."

It was odd, but Jack, Warren and Richard separately, each took Sarah aside and asked her if she had wanted to sell her pig. Each offered to return the money to the circus agent for her and get Bony back.

"I wanted to sell him," said Sarah stolidly, three times.

In the morning she kissed Bony good by and watched him drive away with Richard and Mr. Robinson. Then she went out to the barn, re-

fusing Rosemary's invitation to go over to the Gays'. Shirley went in her stead and they were greeted by a radiant Louisa who declared that her troubles were at an end and that now she had hopes of being able to keep the family together and even educate them.

"Of course we have to be careful," she said, smiling as though that would be comparatively easy. "The quarter's rent Mr. Robinson paid won't quite meet the interest, but Alec thinks he can scrape the rest together somehow. And of course we will have to pay for the potato fertilizer and the store bill is overdue; but we'll manage."

It was on the tip of Rosemary's tongue to tell her about the money Sarah had, but she stopped in time and sent Shirley a warning glance. That pleasure belonged to Sarah and no one should take it from her.

"Will you come upstairs a moment, Rosemary?" asked Louisa, "I want to show you something. Let Shirley play with Kitty in the yard."

The two girls went up the steep, straight stairs and Louisa took her guest into one of the front rooms.

"Mr. Robinson said his wife would be out to

get acquainted with us soon," Louisa explained, "and of course she'll have to stay all night. And where, I ask you, Rosemary, is she to sleep?"

"Why I don't know, dear," replied Rosemary, smiling. "What is the matter with this room?"

She looked about it as she spoke. It was a large, square room, very clean and, it must be confessed, very bare. There was a bureau, one leg missing and the lack supplied by a brick; one chair, the bed and a little table (not large enough to be useful and not small enough to be dainty) completed the furnishings.

"It looks so awful," said poor Louisa. "And of course I can't buy material for curtains; Mother used to say that curtins softened a room and helped to furnish it. But I certainly am thankful for one thing."

"What?" Rosemary asked.

"That I've always saved one pair of Mother's good sheets and her best light blankets and two pillow cases, real linen ones," said Louisa. "When the linen began to wear out, I patched it and darned it as well as I could, but our sheets last winter were made of flour sacks, stitched together. They're white as snow for I bleached them, but I wouldn't want to have Mr. Robinson's wife sleep on flour sack sheets."

"Oh, my, of course not," said the sympathetic Rosemary.

"She won't have to," declared Louisa with satisfaction. "Much as I have wanted to use these sheets and the blankets, I've kept them put away. They are linen Mother had when she was married and I never could afford to buy any like it now."

"That's fine," said Rosemary, a trifle absently. She was studying the windows, three placed close together on one side of the room.

"Do you know, Louisa," she said slowly, "I believe we could make curtains for those windows—just straight side-drapes, you understand, with a plain valance across the top."

"I've seen pictures," Louisa admitted, "but I haven't any material."

"I could get it," Rosemary began, but Louisa shook her head.

"It's a silly idea, anyway," she declared resolutely. "I haven't any business to be thinking about curtains when the whole house is as shabby as my old winter coat. If Mrs. Robinson does come and see new curtains she'd know right away that I'd spent money I couldn't afford on them. She might even get the idea that I was trying to make an impression."

"You have a perfect right to try and make a pleasant impression!" flared Rosemary hotly. "Of course you have. And I'll tell you how to make new curtains and they won't cost a cent —except money you have already paid. Use the blue and white gingham!"

Louisa stared. She had bought, almost as soon as Alec had told her the good news of the farm's rental, a dozen yards of neat blue and white checked gingham to make Kitty and June some much-needed frocks and herself an apron or two.

"But I never heard of gingham curtains!" Louisa protested.

"They're very fashionable for bedrooms," Rosemary assured her. "We have some at Rainbow Hill—I can show you those. And Mother has a magazine with heaps of pictures in that show checked casement curtains. You'll love them when you see them made and hung, Louisa."

"Well—the children can wait for the dresses, I suppose," said Louisa.

And, with Rosemary's help, the curtains were made and hung before the circus agent's wife paid her promised visit. They were a great

success and Louisa was inordinately proud of them.

Now they went back to the kitchen to look again at the gingham.

"I wish there was some way I could earn a little money," said Louisa wistfully.

The knitted face cloth on the back of the kitchen chair was responsible for Rosemary's idea.

"You could knit a bedspread, Louisa!" she said with enthusiasm. "I'll show you how; Miss Clinton told me they sell for lots of money and Warren has a cousin who is a domestic science teacher in a large city; he said she was out here last summer and offered to get orders for Miss Clinton, but she wouldn't agree to sell her spreads. She doesn't need the money, but you do."

Louisa was as excited as Rosemary and before an hour had passed the two girls had, in imagination, knit four elaborate spreads and disposed of them for eighty dollars apiece.

Then Louisa came down to earth and spoke more practically.

"It will take a long time to do a full-sized spread," she said, "but I will have plenty of time to knit this winter. You show me how and Miss

Clinton will help me, if I get stuck in the middle of a pattern. You are too lovely, Rosemary, to think of something I can do!"

"I wish I could earn some money for the Gays," sighed Shirley, trotting home beside Rosemary when they had left the cheerful Louisa.

"Well, you're a pretty little girl to earn money, darling," Rosemary told her, "but I'll try to think of something you can do. We'll ask the boys; they know more about money than we do, Warren and Rich especially."

Her intuition proved to be right, for Warren, consulted, suggested that Shirley might pick herbs, wild ones, and get the Gay children to help her.

"Old Fiddlestrings buys wild herbs and sells them, along with those he raises in his garden, to city druggists," explained Warren. "I'll see him to-night and find out what he wants right now. Then I'll help you till you learn to know the different leaves and after that it will be easy."

Warren was as good as his word and in a few days Shirley and Jim, Kenneth and Kitty Gay were earnestly hunting herbs. They made a few mistakes at first, but soon learned and as it was wholesome work and did not take them off

the farm, they were encouraged to go herb picking every day. Warren acted as selling agent and the little heap of pennies and dimes and nickels in the pink china bank grew steadily.

That, however, was after Sarah had presented her offering to Louisa. For one anxious half day it seemed that there might be no presentation, for Sarah disappeared completely after saying good by to Bony; and diligent search on the part of her sisters failed to produce her.

"Sarah didn't come to lunch, and Mother is worried," announced Rosemary, meeting the wagon as it returned from the cannery with Warren driving and Jack sitting on the empty crates in the back.

Warren reined in the horses and looked anxious.

"She hasn't taken Belle again, has she?" he asked.

"No, I looked and Belle is in the pasture," replied Rosemary. "I've looked everywhere and Winnie came and helped me and Shirley, too. And Hugh telephoned he would be out for dinner—where can she have gone?"

Jack spoke suddenly.

"I'll tell you what I think," he said. "I think she is crying somewhere about Bony. You

know Sarah—she would run a mile before she would let anyone see her cry. And I'll bet seeing Bony go just about broke her heart. She was crazy about that pig."

"Yes, she was," agreed Rosemary. "Poor little Sarah! She was determined to sell him and give the money to Alec and Louisa—and all the time she must have cared so much!"

"You go help Rosemary find her, Jack," said Warren. "Rich and I will get up the next load. Think where she would be likely to run and hide and then look for her there."

Jack jumped down from the wagon and faced Rosemary anxiously.

"Where shall we look?" he asked.

"In the woods," answered Rosemary, after a moment's thought. "There's a place there we call the cave—four rocks around in a ring. You can climb over them and drop down on the moss and it feels as though you really were in a cave. Let's go look there."

The woods were some distance away and the sun was hot, but Rosemary and Jack ran nearly all the way. Rosemary was almost crying, for the more she thought about Sarah, the more plausible it seemed that she must be heart-broken over the loss of her beloved pet.

"You go look," whispered Jack, when they reached the four large rocks Rosemary had described. "Peek over and see if she is there."

Cautiously Rosemary crawled over the rocks —long afterwards she remembered how cool and damp they felt to her fevered hands and knees— and peered down into the green hollow they formed. A little figure in a crumpled tan frock was huddled against one of the stones.

"Sarah!" called Rosemary softly. "Sarah dearest! You must be starved!"

"Go away!" said Sarah crossly.

That was all she would say, though Rosemary told her how worried they had all been, urged that Doctor Hugh was coming to dinner and pleaded with her to come home at once and have something to eat.

"Come on, Sarah—that's a good girl," begged Rosemary. "Jack is here, too, and he wants to get back to work."

"Tell him to go, then," muttered Sarah.

Jack climbed over one of the boulders and gazed down at the obdurate little person whose unhappy brown face lacked its usual life and color. Sarah did not look like herself.

"Look here, Sarah," said Jack with directness, but not unkindly. "Your mother is worried stiff

about you and you're coming back with us and coming now. If you don't want me to climb down there and pull you out, you'd better scramble up this minute."

Suddenly Sarah climbed up the rock furthest from Jack and dropped to the ground. She refused to take Rosemary's hand and scuffed on before them silently, like a small Indian in a very bad temper.

"She does care," whispered Rosemary to Jack. "She always acts like this when she wants to cry and is too proud."

With Rosemary to the left of her and Jack on her right and no possible avenue of escape open, Sarah mounted the porch steps. Someone all in white, fragrant and dainty and sweet, gathered her, dirt-stained and disheveled as she was, into loving arms. Sarah began to cry.

"There, my precious," said Mrs. Willis softly, "tell Mother all about it—she wants to hear."

Rosemary and Jack slipped away.

CHAPTER XXV

UP TO MISCHIEF

ONCE more a flood of moonlight and a night or two when "Old Fiddlestrings" wandered up and down the road playing the "Serenade" and then the first of September was blazoned on the calendar and on the fields of Rainbow Hill. The summer was virtually over.

Jack went away hilariously for a brief fishing trip with his father before the Eastshore schools should open; and to the delight of his mother and sisters, Doctor Hugh came out to stay till they were ready to go back with him, a matter of ten days or so, for school would be in session by the middle of the month.

Finding Sarah in a sad state from violent crying on his arrival the day of Bony's departure, Doctor Hugh was soon in possession of the Gays' story; and he not only succeeded in persuading Louisa and Alec to accept the money Sarah's sacrifice had obtained, but he also man-

aged to give them a more wholesome outlook on the world in general. Although Alec and Louisa were naturally reluctant to accept Sarah's money, when they were finally persuaded, their relief was plain. Now they had enough cash in hand to meet the dreaded interest payment. Alec insisted that the money from Sarah was to be regarded as a loan and Doctor Hugh agreed to this.

"All right," said Sarah when this arrangement was explained to her, "but I don't want to see Bony—not ever any more."

Alec had told her that the pig would probably be brought to the farm to spend the winter and had offered to drive to Eastshore some day and bring her back to see her pet. Sarah's refusal was unmistakable; the parting once made, she was not minded to harrow her feelings again.

Rosemary found Louisa a diligent pupil and the knitted spread was soon under way. Louisa's pet ambition was to buy a good flock of hens and raise chickens. The money earned from the spread, or spreads she might make, she confided to Rosemary, was to be saved toward this venture.

"We haven't had our picnic yet," said Doctor Hugh one morning at the breakfast table. "We

must have one before we go back to town. Let's ask the Gays and the Hildreths and Warren and Richard—next week will be a good time."

And then for a few days a round of emergency calls kept him so busy he forgot that such things as picnics were ever held.

Bringing the car around a few mornings later, intending to take his mother and Winnie in to look at the remodeled house, he found Sarah and Shirley placidly seated behind the wheel when he came out from breakfast.

"You can't go this time—there isn't room," he informed them pleasantly. "Hop out—here come Mother and Winnie."

"You said we could go next time and this is next time," insisted Sarah.

There were tears of disappointment in Shirley's eyes, but she climbed out of the car in response to a second look from Doctor Hugh. Sarah, however, clung to the wheel and had to be lifted out bodily.

"You're too old to act like this," said her brother sternly. "It is important that Mother and Winnie go with me this morning—they were going yesterday and then I had to put them off to go in to the hospital; suppose Mother scowled the way you do, Sarah, when things didn't go to suit her."

Rosemary came out to see them off and Mrs. Willis and Winnie waved as though nothing had happened. Doctor Hugh suddenly swooped down upon Sarah, lifted her high in his arms and kissed her. With another swift kiss for Shirley, he was back in the car before the angry Sarah could recover from her astonishment. The car rolled down the road and left her standing glaring after it.

Sarah was exceedingly put out and she did not attempt to disguise her state of mind. Rosemary, finding it impossible to win her to a more reasonable point of view, went indoors to finish the odds and ends of work Winnie had had to leave undone. This left Shirley to Sarah, and Sarah was like the disgruntled sailor who deliberately incites mutiny.

"I want to be *bad*!" she told Shirley passionately. "Let's think of something awful and go do it!"

Shirley could not think of anything, unfortunately, that is unfortunately from Sarah's point of view.

"I know!" cried that small sinner, after a moment's thought. "We can go in the tool house."

Sarah had remembered what Warren had said

when they first came to the farm—that the tool house was forbidden ground. He had also warned them against going into the windmill.

"Come on, Shirley," cried the naughty Sarah. "We'll look at the old tools—we won't hurt 'em."

She found she had reckoned without the canny Mr. Hildreth, when she reached the tool house. It was securely locked and no amount of tampering could make any impression on the stout padlock.

"Come on, we'll go up in the windmill," said Sarah, not to be balked.

She would have found it hard to explain what satisfaction disobeying Mr. Hildreth and Warren gave her, when her anger was really directed toward her brother. However, she may have reasoned that doing something she knew was wrong was one sure way to plague Doctor Hugh.

Shirley obediently trotted after her sister to the graceful red shingled tower that enclosed the iron framework of the windmill. Alas, for once in his busy life, Mr. Hildreth had inspected the pump and left the door unlocked. Sarah had merely to open it and fold it back and the interior of the mill was revealed to her.

"We'll play it's a robbers' cave, Shirley," suggested Sarah. "It's nice and dark."

She was minded to climb the enticing iron ladder, but fearful lest Shirley develop an obstinate streak and refuse, she had decided to begin with a milder amusement.

"I'll be the robber chief, Shirley," she went on —Sarah had a fondness for such plays and her brother often said that she would have had a wonderful time as a boy. "I'll be the robber chief," she repeated, "and you drag in the loot."

"What's loot?" asked Shirley hopefully, having a vague idea that it was something one ate.

"Loot is what we steal from the noble lords and ladies," Sarah asserted with a faint memory of old firelight stories.

"But where do we get it?" the literal-minded Shirley demanded.

"Oh, we go out and hunt for it," said Sarah. "Don't let anybody see you—remember we're robbers."

And she opened the windmill door cautiously and peered out.

There was no one in sight and the two little girls crept out and sped to the nearest tree with a delicious sense of excitement. If they had turned around and seen someone chasing them, they would not have been surprised.

"Take a stone," said Sarah. "Take a stone

for loot. A little one, Shirley—that one by your foot."

Shirley picked it up and dropped it immediately with a little cry.

"Did you drop it on your foot?" asked Sarah. "What's the matter?"

"Horrid, nasty little bugs under that," Shirley announced, pointing with a dainty pink forefinger at the stone she had sent crashing back to earth.

"Well, a few bugs never hurt anyone," proclaimed Sarah. "I only hope you haven't mashed any; when will you learn not to be afraid of bugs, Shirley?"

Shirley refused to look as Sarah carefully turned the stone over. There were numerous little crawling creatures beneath it and several white slugs.

"I suppose you've murdered a hundred, but I can't see them," Sarah reported. "If I had something to scrape them up with, I could save some."

"Don't play with bugs, Sarah," pleaded Shirley, who knew too well the fatal attraction of all creeping and crawling things for her sister. "I don't like bugs. Leave them alone."

"All right, I will," said Sarah with surprising

amiability. "We'll go back to the cave; I'll take this stone and you needn't take any."

Back to the windmill they went and nothing would please Sarah but closing the door again. She liked the dark, she said.

"What's that?" cried Shirley, starting. "I heard a noise, Sarah."

Sarah had heard it, too.

"It's the clanking chains," she declared with relish.

"What clanking chains?" whispered Shirley fearfully.

"The chains we put on our prisoners," said Sarah whose imagination was stimulated by the dark pit in which she found herself.

"What prisoners?" asked Shirley, fascinated in spite of herself.

"Prisoners we robbed," said Sarah solemnly. "We put long chains on them and they have to walk up and down and they can't get out."

"Oh—Oh—I don't like them to have on long chains," Shirley wailed. "I want you to take them off, Sarah. Please, Sarah."

"Well," Sarah considered. "Perhaps I will. We might as well let the prisoners go, anyway. They make too much noise. Now the chains are off, Shirley."

Just as she said that, the noise sounded louder than before.

"Clank! Clank! Clank!"

"You *said* you took 'em off!" wept Shirley. "You said so, Sarah."

"I thought I did," admitted Sarah. "Wait till I get the door open and I'll see what made that last noise."

She had latched the door of the windmill and in the darkness it took her some time to find it. At last she got it open and the light streamed in, showing Shirley's face streaked with tears.

"I see what made the noise!" proclaimed Sarah triumphantly. "It's the jigger-thing pumping up and down."

The wings of the mill had turned lazily and the iron rods, jerked up and down, had made the clanking noise.

"I don't want to play that any more," said Shirley with more decision than she usually showed.

"We'll play we are firemen and climb the ladder," said Sarah, pointing to the narrow iron ladder that led to the top of the mill.

And she actually helped the confiding Shirley to start the long upward climb and followed close behind her.

Half way up, the inky darkness—for the narrow windows were few and far between, frightened Shirley and she begged to go back. Sarah cajoled and bullied her into continuing and the two children managed to make the steep climb and reach the platform at the top of the mill. As they stepped out on the boards a gust of wind caught the big fan-like sails and the pump began to sound with a loud clanking noise. This and the sensation of being high among the clouds terrified Shirley and she clung to Sarah, screaming.

Sarah would have liked to scream too. Her face was quite white under the tan and she grasped the framework tightly. As she looked far across the fields and felt the dizzy sensation of floating with the clouds that seemed near enough for her hand to touch, one awful thought came to her—"How are we to get back?" She was sure they could never go down that narrow ladder—it had been hard enough to climb up and going down would be impossible.

She sat down, close to the frame, and Shirley hid her face on her shoulder. And there Rosemary found them—having heard from Mrs. Hildreth that they had been seen going down to the brook. The quickest way to reach the brook was past the windmill.

Rosemary called as she came through the field and Sarah heard her. She stood up and shouted and, because the wind had died down and it was very quiet and still, Rosemary, too, heard. Kneeling down, Sarah could see her sister through a knot hole in the platform.

Rosemary's first impulse was to run and get help—someone to bring the girls down, but Sarah implored her "not to tell."

"Everyone will scold and tell Hugh," said Sarah, shouting her plea. "You come get us, Rosemary—please don't tell."

Both she and Shirley were confident that Rosemary could rescue them alone and unaided. As the older, Rosemary was accustomed to helping Sarah out of tight places and, it must be confessed, shielding her from the consequences of her own wrong-doing. She promised not to tell "this time."

Setting her teeth, Rosemary began the climb and accomplished it with fair ease. Her nerves were steady and she was strong and vigorous. But when it came to getting Shirley down, all her powers of endurance were taxed to the utmost.

Shirley was rigid with fright. She wanted to hang on to Rosemary and it was necessary to

force her to face the ladder and come down step by step, Rosemary just below her steadying her with a light touch and constant words of encouragement. Shirley cried piteously, she stopped often and refused to take another step. Rosemary had to plead, to scold, to stimulate, everything but pity—that would have been fatal. Long before they reached the floor of the mill, Rosemary's face and hands were dripping with cold perspiration.

Shirley safe on the ground at last, Rosemary detached her clutching little fingers and went back for Sarah. Gone was Sarah's bravado, lost her courage completely. She hung back and cried and only started the descent when Rosemary threatened to leave her. Twice Sarah lost her footing and shrieked and Rosemary's heart raced madly. The climb seemed interminable and all the time, down in the darkness below, they could hear Shirley crying to herself.

A great wave of thankfulness surged over Rosemary as she felt her foot touch the ground and lifted Sarah from the ladder. They were safe!

"Come away, quick!" said Rosemary, her voice sounding hoarse and unnatural in her own ears. "Don't ever come here again!"

They stumbled over the doorsill, the strong sunlight blinding their eyes after the darkness of the windmill interior. So it happened that none of them saw Warren till he was close to them.

"Rosemary!" he cried in quick alarm. "Is anything the matter? You're as white as a sheet!"

Rosemary tried to smile, but she swayed as she stood. He put an arm around her and led her to an overturned tomato crate under a tree.

"Sit down," he said commandingly. "Do you feel faint?"

"I'm not!" Indignation sent the color flying back to Rosemary's cheeks. "I'm never faint."

But to her disgust, she began to tremble uncontrollably. She shook from head to foot and her lips were blue.

"I was afraid!" she whispered. "So afraid—" and then she could have bitten her tongue.

Sarah and Shirley were dismayed—never had they seen Rosemary like this. They crept close to her and she leaned her head against Sarah, closing her eyes. All the horror of the dizzy climb and descent pressed in upon her, tenfold stronger.

Warren's quick eyes went from face to face.

All three were white and strained. Plainly something had happened. Sarah and Shirley had torn their dresses and there were great dust and oil stains on Rosemary's white skirt.

Warren wheeled and looked back. The windmill door swung slowly in the breeze.

"Rosemary!" he spoke so sharply that she jumped. "Rosemary, have you been in the windmill? Have you been hurt?"

CHAPTER XXVI

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER

WARREN stood a moment in indecision. Rosemary's pallor frightened him and she was evidently concealing something. Sarah and Shirley glanced at him hostilely as though, he thought resentfully, he was in some way to blame.

He turned on his heel and ran over to the mill, shutting the door with a resounding slam. In a trice he had snapped the padlock and had come back to the three girls huddled under the tree.

And then a cheerful whistle sounded and down the lane came the one person Rosemary least desired to see at that moment—Doctor Hugh.

"Got through early!" he called, vaulting the fence and striding toward them. "Why Rosemary! What's wrong?"

Rosemary made a desperate effort to recover her self-control. She managed a shaky smile, but she did not dare try to stand.

"Perhaps you can find out," said Warren

grimly. "I found her like this a few minutes ago and Shirley and Sarah looking as though they'd seen a ghost; and not a word will any of 'em say."

Very coolly, very quietly, very firmly, Doctor Hugh lifted Sarah aside and took her place beside Rosemary on the crate. He rested the tips of his fingers for a moment on the slender wrist nearest him. Then—

"What frightened you, Rosemary?" he asked evenly.

The touch of his skilled fingers seemed to slow down her hammering pulse. Rosemary's troubled gaze swept the circle of faces surrounding her, Sarah's and Shirley's expressive of their anxiety lest she be "sick," Warren's baffled and worried, and came back to the steady, understanding dark eyes behind the doctor's glasses. In that moment Hugh became a tower of refuge to her and she suddenly knew what she would do.

"I don't know what made me act like this," she apologized, a little tinge of color creeping into her white face. "I'm sorry, because I am afraid I have made you think it is worse than it is."

She stopped and looked at Sarah who stared at her in a puzzled way.

"You won't want me to tell, Sarah dear," went on Rosemary, still calmly, "but this time I think I'd better; because—well, because if there should be a next time and you should hurt yourself, I should be to blame. Besides, there is Shirley."

Warren drew a deep breath and Doctor Hugh sent a look toward Sarah that made that young person decidedly uncomfortable though she pretended to be absorbed in the antics of a beetle and sat down, cross-legged, to consider it.

"Then it was the windmill?" asked Warren.

"Yes, it was the windmill," nodded Rosemary, putting her arm around Shirley who was beginning to feel that her adored older sister had for once deserted her.

And then she told them, graphically and in detail, how she had found the two children on the platform and of the climbs she had made to bring them down safely.

"That part wasn't so bad, really it wasn't," she explained earnestly. "Though when Sarah's foot slipped—"

Warren looked at Doctor Hugh.

"But I keep thinking of that awful platform!" cried Rosemary, hiding her face against her brother's shoulder and tightening her arm about

Shirley. "Every time I close my eyes I can see them there—and it is such a narrow space and they could have fallen off so easily—"

"Stop!" said Doctor Hugh sternly. "Stop that at once, Rosemary. You are letting your imagination run away with you. Closing your eyes and thinking what might have happened, will not do at all. You'll get the better of your nerves, if you try. Don't think what has happened and, above all, don't talk about it. Tag around after Warren and Rich to-day and keep so busy you haven't time to think—you'll find the worst is over now that you have told us."

Rosemary lifted her head. She was quite herself, her blue eyes told Warren. Under her arm, Shirley peeped uncertainly at her brother.

"Come around here where I can see you, Shirley," he commanded.

She obeyed disconsolately.

"You were there when Warren said that you must not go in the windmill, weren't you?" said Doctor Hugh. "And now you see what happens when you disobey him. I understand that Sarah suggested this disobedience, but that doesn't excuse you, Shirley; there have been plenty of times when you have refused to do as Sarah asked you to. You didn't have to be naughty because she was, did you?"

Shirley shook her head.

"I know you're sorry," her brother went on. "Then tell Warren so—and next time, Shirley, have a mind and will of your own when you are asked to do something you know is wrong."

Warren accepted Shirley's apology gravely and then made a suggestion.

"I'm going over to the mill with the heavy wagon," he said, "and if you want to come along, I'll take you. I'll harness up now and let the team stand till after dinner."

Sarah scrambled to her feet with the evident intention of including herself in the invitation.

"Run along, Rosemary," directed Doctor Hugh, "and take Shirley with you. But I want to talk to you, Sarah."

Rosemary glanced back as she walked away with Warren.

"Poor Sarah!" she said. "I'm so sorry and I know Hugh is going to scold. But oh, Warren, I think I did right."

"Sure," agreed Warren tersely. He had been more shaken by her recital than he cared to admit.

"I couldn't have given Sarah away like that, if it hadn't been for Shirley," said Rosemary, her eyes now on the infinitely dear little figure

dancing ahead. "Sarah asked me not to tell and I said I wouldn't—and I never have before. Once she lost Aunt Trudy's ring and we all got in an awful mess, but we wouldn't tell. Hugh said then it was wrong and not being truly kind to Sarah.

"I didn't see it that way—then," confessed Rosemary. "But to-day—well, to-day, Sarah frightened me so! And I thought that if I kept still and said nothing, next time she might hurt herself or Shirley—when she makes up her mind, she can persuade Shirley to do anything. And Sarah goes a little bit further every time, unless she is stopped."

"If you are fretting about whether you did the right thing or not, forget it," Warren advised her seriously. "In the first place, your brother would have had the truth from you in five minutes and in the second place shielding Sarah when she is in a fair way to break her neck unless someone interferes, isn't far from wicked, to my way of thinking."

"But she trusts me," urged Rosemary. "Suppose I have lost her confidence?"

"You haven't," said Warren with conviction. "More likely, you've gained her respect."

Sarah was never to forget the talk with Doc-

tor Hugh that morning. He sat down beside her on the grass and gravely and kindly, without raising his voice or threatening punishment, made her see what she had done.

"You were angry at me and you wanted to do something to 'get even,' Sarah," he began. "And to satisfy that miserable little desire to get even, you would have let serious injury, perhaps worse, come to Shirley and Rosemary—Shirley who would follow you anywhere and Rosemary who loves you so much she would dare anything for you."

Ignoring her tears and protests, he spoke to her of the responsibility of an older sister for a younger one and explained the far-reaching consequences of temper and disobedience.

"You have frightened Rosemary and you have disappointed me," he said sadly. "We both thought that head-strong and willful and reckless as you are, you would always take care of Shirley. How can we ever trust her to you again?"

"I didn't think she would get hurt," wept Sarah. "I do take care of her."

"My dear little sister—" Doctor Hugh took her in his arms and the stolid Sarah clung to him crying as though her heart would break. "My dear, dear little sister, it is because I want

you to always think first, before you do something wrong, that I am talking to you like this. Shirley admires you—when you do the right thing, she will try to imitate you even more readily than when you do wrong. You are constantly setting her an example."

He let her cry a little while and then supplied her with his clean pocket handkerchief. With her flushed face pressed against his coat, Sarah listened while he explained gently the old, old lessons and laws that govern us all.

"Remember this, Sarah," he concluded earnestly, "you may think, when you do wrong, that you will take all the punishment yourself, but you can not; no one can bear the consequences of a misdeed wholly alone. Every time you do wrong you hurt someone else, two or three others, perhaps, and usually those who love you most."

Sarah was only nine years old, but she understood. Doctor Hugh had a faculty for making people understand him. He slipped his hand under Sarah's chin now and lifted the little brown face till the shamed dark eyes met his.

"Am I to trust you again, Sarah?" he asked gravely.

The little brown face grew vivid, resolution

and love contending for possession of the dark eyes.

"I will be *just* as good!" promised Sarah. "Truly I will, Hugh."

And they sealed the compact with a kiss.

CHAPTER XXVII

SUMMER'S END

"KEEP away from that coffee pot!" said Warren for the sixth time in as many minutes.

Rosemary laughed and pulled Shirley back from the fire.

After twice fixing a day for the picnic, only to have Doctor Hugh summoned by telephone and obliged to remain away till early evening, the suggestion of a picnic supper had been suggested and accepted.

"A good idea, I call it," Winnie had approved. "We won't have to start till around four o'clock and by that time Hughie ought to have a couple of hours off, anyway. I'm not crazy about eating outdoors, but if a body can have something hot, it isn't so bad as it might be."

Warren and Richard had promised to build the fire and make the coffee—they assured Win-

nie that even she would praise their brew—and Doctor Hugh had insisted on the "hot dogs" without which no properly conducted supper—so he said—could be arranged. He was sharpening a stick to serve Sarah as a toaster now.

Winnie's hospitable soul rejoiced in the groups gathered about the glowing fire, built on an improvised stone hearth between two tree stumps. Winnie had put her best efforts into the food and she liked to be assured that the quantity, as well as the quality, would be appreciated.

They were all there—the six from the Willis household, Mr. and Mrs. Hildreth, Richard and Warren; and the six Gays with roly-poly little Mrs. Robinson and her husband who had come up to introduce his wife to the farm and leave her there while he finished "the season" on the road. Mrs. Willis had been delighted to have this opportunity to meet the people who were to live with the Gay children and who would, she reasoned, have more or less influence over them.

Mrs. Robinson had been three days at the farm and already she had won the friendship of Louisa and Alec, not an easy matter to bring about. The younger children were devoted to her and it was apparent that the motherless

household unconsciously welcomed her wealth of tact and wisdom and sympathy.

"They need you so," said Mrs. Willis when she had a chance to speak confidentially to the wife of the circus agent.

"Not more than I need them," responded Mrs. Robinson. "They have no mother and I have no children."

And if the payment of the quarter's rent in advance had "turned the luck," as Alec insisted, it was the coming of Mrs. Robinson that turned the Gays back to normal, happy living.

Rosemary had stipulated that the "grown-ups" were to visit and leave the preparation of the supper to the children. Most of the preparation was confined to setting the table—on a flat rock—and to boiling the coffee and toasting the meat. Richard and Warren were in charge of the fire and Louisa and Rosemary undertook to set out the eatables, while Alec carried fresh water from the spring, fished out ants from the milk pitcher and endeavored to keep the younger fry from tasting everything left unguarded.

Sarah's insistence on toasting her own "hot dog" led to a general clamor for sticks and Doctor Hugh obligingly whittled a dozen wands,

taking care to make them long as a precaution against a too eager approach to the fire.

The table looked very pretty when Rosemary summoned them, for a bouquet was in the center and tiny wreaths of flowers circled the paper dishes. Warren's coffee was pronounced delicious and Winnie received so many compliments on her stuffed eggs and the potato salad that she told Mrs. Hildreth it would serve her right if the cake should turn out to be soggy.

"Then," declared Mrs. Hildreth neatly, "I should know it was no cake of your baking!"

But one distressing incident interrupted the serene progress of that wonderful supper—when the paper cup of ants and bugs and beetles and flies that Sarah had captured before sitting down, upset directly into her saucer of home-made ice cream. Even that catastrophe could not mar the general enjoyment, though Sarah retired to fish out the bugs carefully by hand with the forlorn hope of "drying them off and saving them."

When the supper was over and everything cleared away, Warren built up the fire again and they gathered around it. The day had been warm but a slight chill was in the air—the early touch of fall.

"It doesn't seem as though we were going home to-morrow," remarked Rosemary pensively. "And school opens next week."

"The summer has gone so swiftly," said Mrs. Willis. "I can scarcely realize that this is September. The Hammonds have started—Hugh had a letter yesterday."

"I think it's been a long summer," declared Sarah, trying to hide a yawn.

"Well, I'm glad it's over," said Louisa bluntly.

Then the baby June was discovered asleep in Alec's lap and Mrs. Robinson offered to take her back to the house and put her to bed. Louisa decreed that bed-time had arrived for the other Gays and they all turned homeward, promising to say good by to the Willises in the morning.

"And remember you've promised to bring Rosemary out to see us this winter, Doctor Willis," Louisa reminded him.

"You come along Sarah and see the new tricks I've taught your pig," said Mr. Robinson with the kindest intention in the world.

Sarah made no reply. She had never voluntarily mentioned Bony since the morning she had watched him driven off the farm and gradually her mother and sisters had forgotten him.

Not so Sarah. She never forgot but nothing ever induced her to go and see the pig though she had plenty of opportunities later, had she so desired.

The twilight shut down and Warren added more fuel to the fire. Shirley pressed close to her mother, hoping to hide the fact that she, too, was getting sleepy.

"I don't think it was a long summer," she chirped, "I would like more summer to get herbs in; Mr. Fiddlestrings likes us to get them for him."

"You don't call him that, do you?" asked Rosemary, shocked.

"Everyone does," retorted Shirley. "Only they say 'Old Fiddlestrings' and we don't—do we, Sarah?"

"He has a stuffed snake," said Sarah who seldom troubled herself to answer questions that failed to directly interest her. "Rich, you said you'd show me how to stuff a snake and you never did.'"

"Well, I never got around to it," Richard apologized. "I'm one who found the summer too short."

Mr. Hildreth grunted.

"Guess you don't need a stuffed snake,

Sarah," he said humorously. "A stuffed chicken seemed to be too much for your family."

Sarah looked disgusted, while the others laughed at the recollection of that chicken. Sarah, a few weeks before, had found a dead chicken under the carriage house and had decided it to be a Heaven-sent opportunity to practise her theories of taxidermy. She had stuffed the carcass with a variety of available materials—grass and hay and pebbles, mixed with small sticks and cakes of mud—and, her task completed, had hidden the treasure in a cupboard in the pantry. For some reason she deemed the sympathy of her family doubtful and she made no mention of the experiment to anyone.

It was not long before Winnie complained of an unpleasant odor in her always thoroughly aired pantry. She stood it for one day, grumbling. The second day she began to talk about "country plumbing" and the third morning she started in to scrub and scour and disinfect vigorously. Her activities led her to the dark corner where Sarah had stowed her chicken and the subsequent interview was brief and to the point. Sarah buried the unfortunate fowl, using the cake turner which she was later to bury

also on command of Winnie, and this, to date, had been her sole experience with "stuffing" anything.

Rosemary leaned forward, smiling at the fire.

"What are you thinking of, Rosemary?" asked her brother, dexterously shifting Sarah's position so that she could not kick the fire with her shoes —a feat she was anxious to accomplish.

"Oh, ever so many things," said Rosemary. "About Louisa and Alec and the circus. And the poor farm, too."

Warren was watching the fire closely, too.

"I drove past the poor farm the other day," he said slowly, "and the lawns have all been ploughed up and seeded. There's no place now for the folks to sit, except on the back porch. Not till the new grass has a good start."

"I don't see why Sarah is always planning a farm for animals," Rosemary declared a little passionately. "If I ever have a farm it is going to be a home for people who haven't any other home. People like the Gays and old men and women who have no one to take care of them."

"I'll have a poor farm, too," cried Sarah, wide awake in an instant. "I never thought of that. I'll have a place for sick animals, too, but I'll have a real poor farm for old horses and cows

and pigs and things—when they're too old to work, like old Belle."

Warren and Richard laughed and Doctor Hugh patted his small sister's energetic dark head.

"I wish you and Rosemary could do all you plan," he said with a half sigh. "There's room enough for that help and more."

Mrs. Hildreth, her busy hands for once idle, stared at the blazing fire. She had told her husband earlier in the day that she hardly knew how to behave at a picnic, it had been so long since she had allowed herself such a frivolous pleasure.

She sat now, between Winnie and Mrs. Willis, tense and upright, unable to relax, but resting nevertheless.

"It's been a nice summer," she said slowly. "I don't know when I've had time go so fast. Young people in the house and outside do brighten things up amazingly. And Warren and Rich have made me so little trouble—I never knew two boys who needed less waiting on; yes, I've had a nice summer. I can say that."

Warren's tanned face flushed a little and Richard stirred uneasily. Both recalled moments of impatience, fortunately suppressed, and remembered small kindnesses they might have

easily performed. Poor Mrs. Hildreth, so utterly unable to take life easily, was something of a taskmaster like her husband. She prided herself on asking no more of anyone than she was willing to do herself and the result was nerves strung up to concert pitch and a volume of work turned out that was the wonder of a neighborhood famed for its industry. Warren and Richard felt guiltily that they might have made more positive contributions to her "nice summer," but they were thankful for the little they had done to lighten the good woman's labors.

"How about you, Mother?" said Doctor Hugh mischievously.

"I? Oh, I have learned to love Rainbow Hill," was Mrs. Willis' response. "I could ask no more of any summer than these weeks have given me—love and happiness and health. And to-morrow we're going home!"

Rosemary smiled across the fire at her mother. She, too, liked to think of going home.

"I only hope the smell of the paint will be out of the house," remarked Winnie who could never, under any circumstances, be accused of being sentimentally inclined.

"And the gas stove," went on Winnie dream-

ily. "If that Greggs has been mixing messes on it and dropping his glue on the enamel, I'll give him a piece of my mind. I left that kitchen like wax and it's my hope to find it like that, but I have my doubts."

Doctor Hugh laughed and put back a brand that slipped from the glowing embers.

"Ah, Winnie, you know you can hardly wait to get to the straightening up part," he accused her. "You're already turning the rooms inside out in your mind's eye for a grand cleaning. I had thought of getting someone to come in and have it all in order for you and then I was afraid you might not like it so I changed my mind."

"Hughie, if a strange person lays hand on a thing in that house," began Winnie solemnly and then she stopped as she saw the smiling face.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to be teasing me," she scolded.

"Shirley's asleep and so is Winnie," said Doctor Hugh suddenly.

"I am not!" protested Shirley indignantly as usual.

"Eh?" Winnie jerked her eyes open with a start. "For mercy's sake, do we have to stay out here all night?" she demanded crossly. "I can stand a picnic supper, if I have to, but it's

no picnic for me to have to sleep out on damp grass."

Doctor Hugh laughingly declared that after that gentle hint there was nothing to do but go in. He helped the boys cover the fire and stamp out every vestige of an ember and then led the way to the house, carrying Shirley and leading Sarah who pretended to be very wide-awake but whose feet lagged unaccountably.

"I declare, I can't get used to having no dinner dishes to wash," said Winnie when they had reached the porch. "I'm going in now and see if I left the kitchen in good order."

She disappeared and Mrs. Willis took Shirley and Sarah up to bed, while Doctor Hugh snapped on the reading light.

"I want to look over the paper," he said comfortably. "Don't go, Warren—it's early yet, Rich."

Rosemary found her favorite low rocker and the boys chose the swing.

"We'll miss this," said Warren slowly.

"Yes, we haven't any swing at Ag State," declared Richard with a grin.

"You know what I mean, well enough," retorted Warren. "Confabs, music—being inside a home."

Richard was silent. He knew.

"Mother says she asked you to write to her," broke in Rosemary. "She says we'll never forget this dear little house at Rainbow Hill and the friends we've made this summer."

"Have you found your pot of gold, Rosemary?" asked Richard, watching the light which threw the outline of the girl's pretty head into relief.

Rosemary laughed a little. Early in the summer Mrs. Hildreth had explained that the name "Rainbow Hill" had been given the farm by Mrs. Hammond because the first time she had seen the house its roof had been spanned by a beautiful rainbow. The Willis girls had waited hopefully two months for a glimpse of a rainbow, but none had been vouchsafed them. Sarah, for one, believed the rainbow to be as mythical as the pot of gold Mrs. Hildreth had told her was always to be found at its end.

"I don't believe I've found any pot of gold," said Rosemary wistfully.

"Oh, yes, you have," contradicted Warren. "Look at the Gays—you helped them find their pot of gold; look at Miss Clinton—you gave her many happy hours; look at Mrs. Hildreth—she says she never knew a summer to go so

quickly and it's all because she has had someone cheerful to talk to her. Look at Rich and me—"

"Oh, Warren!" Rosemary protested. "Sarah did more for the Gays than ever I did. And Mother and Winnie talked to Mrs. Hildreth. I haven't done anything."

"It's your pure joyousness, I think," went on Warren as though he had not heard her. "I don't believe enough people are simply happy in this world. That's your pot of gold, Rosemary—happiness. And you share it with everyone you meet. It makes a fellow feel—well, as though he were standing on a mountain top in the morning, just to look at you."

"Oh!" said Rosemary softly, astonished at quiet Warren and yet oddly pleased, too. "Oh!"

"You're even glad to go back to school, aren't you, Rosemary?" asked Richard with a half unconscious sigh. Going back to school for him, and for Warren, meant much hard work and more anxiety.

The dreamy light went out of the girl's eyes. Her lovely, vivid face glowed with characteristic enthusiasm. It might be said of Rosemary that no future was ever else than rosy to her ardent gaze.

"Of course I'll be glad!" she answered ea-

gerly. "It will be my last year in grammar school, you know. And it's sure to be exciting—in spots. Besides I just love going ahead!"

Across his lowered paper, Doctor Hugh smiled at the two boys in the swing.

"And that," he said whimsically, "explains why Rosemary is Rosemary."

THE END

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